

stranger things the 2nd chapter by
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Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Romance, Sci-Fi

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2017-03-09 19:58:08

Updated: 2017-05-23 17:24:06

Packaged: 2019-12-17 15:26:30

Rating: T

Chapters: 5

Words: 27,420

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Eleven never disappeared but the danger is far from over. As she struggles to deal her past and make peace with the outside world Mike will be her sanity and she will be his. Everyone desperately reaches for normalcy but "normal" is no longer a possibility. stranger things are definitely happening in Hawkins

1. Chapter 1

Chapter one

I won't leave you

She lied on the cold laminate floor her eyes were heavy and her body felt numb. Blood dripped down the side of her face and she wanted to wipe it away but she couldn't lift her hand. she was almost paralyzed.

"Mike," she whimpered.

"It's okay, you'll be okay. I promise," Mike reassured her calmly as he gently placed his folded jacket under her head. He was panicking on the inside but he couldn't allow her to realize this.

Her eyelids drooped closed slowly and a bloody tear streaked down her cheek. He had never seen blood come from her eyes before this must have indicated a new level of deterioration for her. It scared him half to death. He didn't know if she realized it but her powers were controlled by her brain. It only made sense that the blood witch leaked from her nose ears and eyes were a result of her hemorrhaging. It made him wish she never used her super natural abilities he knew it was hurting her.

Mike swiped the blood from her cheek and took her hand. She was so cold he held her finger in his palm in an attempt to warm them.

"El, El open your eyes, you can't go to sleep okay," he told her. He felt tears sneaking up behind his eyes. He was so afraid that if she went to sleep now she'd never wake up.

Her eyes opened again and they were even more blood shot than before.

"Mike, I'm scared," she whispered her soft voice was even weaker than it ever had been.

The simple words broke his heart. He didn't know how to fix this. He watched her laying there sick possibly dying. Her body was shaking from exhaustion or cold he wasn't sure witch. He slipped one arm

under her head cradling it in his elbow. With his other arm he lifted her legs and pulled her limp body in to his lap. Her head rested on his shoulder she didn't have the strength to hold it up on her own. Mike leaned back against the wall and held her close rubbing her arm to try and warm her up some. He didn't want to except that he couldn't help her even though in the back of his mind he knew it was true. She needed a doctor her condition was far worse than they'd ever seen.

Eleven suddenly started to cough and gag uncontrollably. Mike tried to sit her up but she was dead weight. Dustin saw the struggle and helped pull her forward. Mike held her up right because she would've wilted if he didn't.

"We need to take her to the hospital. She won't last much longer," Mike stated.

"Hopper said he'll come back for us," Lucas stated.

"Hopper is in the upside down who knows how long it'll take him to come back," Mike replied.

"He told us to stay here I think we should listen," Lucas retorted.

"Lucas look at her, she's dying!" Mike exclaimed, he didn't want to use those words but he knew it was true.

As if to confirm his statement Eleven choked out a painful whimpering sound and coughed up a mouth full of dark crimson blood.

"Gnarly," Dustin gagged.

"It's okay," Mike whispered gently stroking her back "you're going to be okay."

He felt empty when the paramedics quickly swept her from his arms. He wanted badly to go with her but he wasn't family so he knew the answer would be no. The three boys had no clue how the hospital knew to send help but they had gotten there just in time. They'd tried frantically to get a hold of someone anyone on the phone but all the schools phones were fried. One of the paramedics told them that

someone else was on their way to get them. Hopper possibly, he didn't tell who. Either way Mike was relieved. The hospital was too far to walk but he was sure he could convince whoever was coming for them to take him there.

"Oh shit!," Dustin exclaimed suddenly.

"What?" Mike questioned jumping to his feet.

"It's my mom!" Dustin replied "She's going to freak out! I'll be grounded till I'm twenty!"

"How did she found out we're here?" Lucas asked.

"She probably has a tracking device implanted in my brain or something how am I supposed to know. The point is if she knows all our parents know and that means we're all in deep shit." Dustin exclaimed.

"Well at least we're alive," Mike replied, he had a new found appreciation for life after that night. Having a gun pointed at his chest and holding Eleven in his arms as she slowly reached for death made him realize how lucky he was to be alive. Even if his parents grounded him until he was twenty.

"Have you lost your mind?!" Dustin asked.

"Dustin!?" a voice shouted from down the hall.

"Oh no," Dustin sighed, "I'll see you guys in prison,"

The cafeteria doors flung open and Ilene Henderson stormed up to her son "What in the hell have you been up to?! I've been worried sick!"

"You wouldn't belie me if I told you," Dustin replied "I know I know I'm grounded."

"Whatever made you think that?" Ilene questioned sarcastically "In the car!"

"Let me know if El's okay," Dustin said as his mom walked off.

"Oh boy, what do we tell our parents when they get here?" Lucas asked.

"The truth?" Mike suggested, only half serious.

"Oh yeah sure, hey mom sorry I was out so late we had to go save Will, who is still alive by the way. He was just trapped in another dimension with this crazy ass monster that was able to get to our world because of some government facility that is secretly conducting experiments. And oh yeah this is Eleven she has super powers. They are totally going to buy that." Lucas replied sarcastically.

"Well then we lie, a lot," Mike stated. He was technically engaged in the conversation but a larger proportion of his mind was focused on Eleven. The sound of her gagging and gasping for breath was haunting him as if she were still there with him. He just needed to know that she was okay.

"I hope they found Will," Lucas sighed suddenly changing the subject. He could sense that Mike didn't care about what their parents had to say.

"I hope he's okay, who knows what it could be like in there," Mike replied.

Two of his friends were really sick and possibly dead, there was that word again, death. He had never really pondered the meaning. He knew what it meant of course. But knowing the definition of the word and actually feeling the effects of it are two completely different things. He tried to recall if he'd ever really encountered death before this. His grandmother passed away when he was a baby. It was sad that he didn't remember her but with not remembering her there was no sense of loss. He wasn't sure he would survive losing both Eleven and Will.

He felt so guilty and he wouldn't dare admit it but he was more afraid of losing El he felt awful. He was more afraid to lose the girl he only met a week ago verses the friend he'd known since they were in diapers. Maybe it was because he'd already mourned Will for a while. For that one night that he thought Will was dead. Maybe because of this he was more ready to lose him. That must have been it. Or

maybe Lucas was right maybe it was because he had feelings for Eleven that he didn't have for anyone else. Not long ago he used to think that people who fell in love and kissed and held hands were gross. But just an hour ago he found himself wanting very badly to kiss her, he had kissed her. He felt that it was something more than that. He wanted to protect her and make her feel safe. He only wanted the best for her and when around her he never put himself first. It was instinct for him to throw himself in front of her when that man, the man she called "papa" came to get her. He didn't care what the consequences were and when he said that they would have to kill him first to get to her he meant it.

Both their parents arrived at the same time and Mike prepared himself for a brutal scolding.

"Michael!" his mother shouted as she ran towards him.

To his surprise instead of yelling at him she pulled him into a bone crushing hug. She pulled away and started to look him over frantically searching for any sign that he was hurt.

"Where have you been? Are you hurt? Is this blood?" Karen asked in a panic.

Mike looked down to see a spot of blood on his shirt from when Eleven had laid her head on his shoulder. He suddenly got an idea.

"I hit my head really hard; I think I might need to go to the hospital." Mike replied holding a hand to the side of his head.

Karen moved his hand aside and looked at his scalp seeing nothing unusual.

"I don't see anything Honey,"

"It just really hurts," he pressed, he felt bad about lying to his mom but had to get to Eleven.

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When they arrived at the hospital Mike was practically met at the doors by none other than Joyce Byers. It was a complete coincident

she just happened to be pacing by the double doors when they walked in.

"Joyce what are you doing here, is everything okay?" Karen asked.

"Ah yeah everything's fine, uh Jonathan just cut his hand doing yard work we should be out of here soon." She replied hoping that the lie was convincing. Lies had become a way of survival for many in Hawkins "why are you here?"

"My son is Michael Wheeler, need I say more?" Karen replied.

Mike had always been a bit of a renowned klutz. He had a bit of a warp sheet at Hawkins ER.

"You go sit down I'll register you," Karen told him softly.

Mike watched his mother walk up to the nurses station and as soon as she was out of ear shot he turned to Joyce.

"Will?" It wasn't a full phrased question but it didn't need to be.

"He's with the doctors now, I haven't heard anything yet. But he was breathing well on the way here." Joyce replied trying to remain hopeful. Hope was all she had left.

"Did you happen to see Eleven come in?" Mike asked fearing the answer. Joyce sighed and he knew something was wrong. "Please tell me,"

"I was out having a smoke when they got here. They had to resuscitate her in the ambulance bay. They got her breathing again but she looked to be in really bad shape." She told him reluctantly "I'm really sorry kiddo'. But she's strong and she's a fighter if anyone can make out of this it's her."

Mike pictured it for a moment. A doctor pumping on her chest another using a device to make her breath. Then her body jumping when they shocked her with the paddles, just like in the movies. He quickly washed the image from his mind.

"You're right, she's a fighter. She'll be okay I know it," he said more to

reassure himself than anyone else. "And Will is going to be okay too he's stubborn there's no way he'd fight through all that just to give up now."

"Oh do I know it," Joyce laughed thinking about how persistent her son could be. "Hey, I put word in with the doctors told them that I know Eleven. They'll update me on her; I'll keep you posted too."

"Thanks, do you think they'll let me and the others see Will?" Mike questioned.

"As soon as he's doing good enough to have visitors I'm sure," Joyce replied.

An hour passed and pressure mounted. Mike was tempted to get up and start pacing just like Joyce had been doing non-stop. He knew his mother would order him to sit down. He knew he should tell her that he wasn't actually hurt. It had accrued to him that he didn't want to take up attention of the doctors if he didn't need it. The question was how to bring it up and how to prevent his mom from creating a scene.

"Joyce Byers" a voice summoned from the other end of the room.

Mike turned in his chair to see a doctor talking to Joyce. He was too faraway to hear what they were saying. He was facing the doctor who did nothing for him to tell the nature of the news. A doctor's face was almost always somber. He watched until they finished and thankfully Joyce walked up to him.

"Mike, she's stable and she's awake. He said she's been asking for you." Joyce told him with a small smile.

Mike nearly jumped out of his seat he wanted to run to her.

"Wait, who?" his mother asked in confusion.

"One of my friends, she's sick. Mom you have to let me go see her please. She needs me right now." Mike pleaded with his mother.

Karen almost did double take. She never thought it possible. Her son close friends with a girl or even more shocking possibly more than

friends. Why hadn't she heard of this girl?

"Mom please," Mike practically begged.

"I think you should wait until the doctor sees you," Karen sighed deciding she could ask him questions later.

"I'm not really hurt, I just told you that so you would bring me here. I know I shouldn't have lied but I was just really worried about her. You can ground me and yell at me later please mom she's really sick!" Mike rambled on.

Karen just blinked that day had been very eventful she just couldn't believe what she was hearing.

"Alright, go see your friend. But we need to talk." Karen sighed.

"We will I promise," Mike replied before practically running to the doors.

He stopped suddenly realizing he had no idea where he was going. He waited for Joyce to catch up with him almost bouncing on his heels in impatience. He wouldn't feel better until he saw her for himself. Joyce led him down a dimly lit sterile hallway and at the end a door was propped open slightly. Mike practically leaped for the handle and yanked it open.

His heart fell when he saw her. She looked so sick she was paler than he was and that was impressive. She had dark veins streaking down her face just below her eyes. It reminded him of one of Nancy's porcelain dolls that had cracks on its face. It was almost symbolic. El was beautiful and perfect like that doll but now she looked broken just vulnerable and... broken. But to him she was no less beautiful.

A dull mechanical beeping sounded at intervals every few seconds. He noticed that her breathing looked forced almost painful. A thin tube ran from behind her ears in front of her nose delivering the oxygen that she was too weak to breathe in. As he approached the bed he saw an IV taped back of her hand. It looked far too large for her delicate hand.

Eleven's eye lashes fluttered and her eyes blinked open. Her eyes

were glassy and lacked the usual emotion he saw in the wide brown orbs.

"Mike?" her voice was quiet and starchy.

"I'm here El," Mike replied softly as he sat on the bed and took her hand.

Her hands were so cold her hands were almost always cold. He remembered the night they met in the middle of the woods. It was freezing and pouring rain she was only wearing a large men's t-shirt. He took her hand to lead her to his bike and to reassure her that she was safe. Her hands felt the same as that night. Only now she gripped his hands with the same certainty as he held hers.

Her eyes blinked open and closed heavy from exhaustion. But she forced herself to stay awake.

"Where are we?" she asked her voice quivering slightly.

"You're in the hospital El," Mike told her with a small apologetic smile. He couldn't help but feel that it was partly his fault that she was so sick.

"Hospital?" El questioned.

"It's the place where all the sick people go. The doctors here help them get better." Mike explained.

Doctors, she knew that word and she didn't like it. Papa was a doctor and a lot of his friends were too. His friends were bad people and so was he. Doctors were bad people. This was a bad place they would hurt her there and now they would hurt Mike too.

"No, no," she whimpered.

The monitor started to beep faster and Mike could see her getting distressed.

"It's okay, it's okay you're safe here," he reassured her squeezing her hand gently.

"No, no, not safe," she replied.

"Why, why isn't it safe here" Mike asked trying to get to bottom of her fears.

"Bad people," she answered trying to push herself upright, she was too weak support herself.

"El it's okay, there's no bad people here. I've been here a lot of times the doctors are nice. They went to school and learned about medicine so they could help people who are sick just like you are. They're good people." Mike explained trying desperately to calm her.

He hated it, seeing her so scared. He imagined this is what she must have looked like when Dr. Brenner experimented on her in the lab. Then it hit him, the sterile hallways, white lights, Doctors. This must have seemed a lot like the lab to her. No wonder she was terrified.

"Oh El, look I know this probably looks like Hawkins lab, but it's different. No one here is going to hurt you they just want to help you get better. El no one is going to hurt you, I won't let them," Mike vowed to her.

"Promise?" she asked tears dwelling in her wide eyes.

"I promise," he nodded "Now you need to calm down you're going to make yourself sicker."

She felt his thumb massaging her palm and looked into his warm eyes. She could feel herself calming down. Her body relaxed and she allowed herself to sink back into the bed. She was exhausted, even sitting up took too much energy. As she lied her head back on the pillow Mike noticed her breathing was more laboured than when he first walked in.

"El you should go to sleep," he suggested, he knew she need to rest.

She wanted to sleep and she felt that she could now that Mike was with her. She knew she was safe with him. If Mike was there no one would hurt her or take her anywhere while she slept.

"Don't leave me," she whispered as her heavy eyes closed.

She rarely spoke in sentences but when she did Mike felt his heart skip. He couldn't explain it but he wanted her to talk more he loved her voice.

"I won't leave El," Mike replied.

It didn't take her long to fall asleep. Mike just sat there and watched her sleep. She was so beautiful he was absolutely taken by the sight of her. Eleven's eyelashes fluttered and her head turned slightly. She tightened her grip on his hand and he found himself smiling. She looked even more innocent and vulnerable when she was sleeping. Mike felt an overwhelming urge to protect her. The thought of someone hurting Eleven filled him with rage and adrenaline. He knew his vows to protect her was stupid. Despite how weak and fragile she appeared and maybe felt, she was way stronger than he could ever be. He knew if someone came to take her all he would be able to do is throw himself in front of her. He had no chance at winning a fight. But he would gladly take a bullet for her.

"Mike," El whispered in her sleep.

He smiled widely and laughed a little. She made him happy.

"Mike," she muttered again stirring under the covers.

His smile disappeared she seemed to be in distress. She must have been having a nightmare.

"Mike, no," El whimpered "No stop it, stop it."

He didn't know what to do. He rubbed her arm trying to calm her. It didn't seem to be helping she just became more panicked.

"El it's okay, it's okay you're dreaming," Mike whispered trying to wake her.

She continued to squirm whimpering his name muttering "no" "please" and "Stop it". He felt terrible she wasn't actually in danger but he still wanted to protect her from whatever was attacking her subconscious.

"Eleven wake up, you're okay I'm here," he said a little louder this

time he shook her a little.

A tear slipped from beneath her closed lids and Mike felt his heart twist painfully. He continued his efforts to wake her maybe shaking her a little too roughly. Just when he thought it was hopeless she screamed and jolted upright nearly smashing her head off his. She was panting her heart was racing so hard it felt like it was going to burst. She saw Mike sitting there in front of her and immediately broke into tears. Mike pulled her into a soft embrace and she gladly clung to him.

"El it's okay, it was just dream," he whispered. He could feel her tears seeping through his shirt.

The door swung open suddenly making a loud bang as it bounced off the wall behind it. The sound made Eleven jump and Mike turned his head to see who just stormed into the room. His cheeks got warm as he saw his mother standing there. He almost pushed Eleven away but thought better of it, that would only hurt her. Besides friends could hug it wasn't like he was doing anything inappropriate with her. But still knowing there were more than friendly feeling behind the embrace made him very embarrassed being caught in the act.

"Is everything okay? I heard someone scream," Karen asked, she'd been waiting in the hall for the past thirty minutes trying to be patient.

"Everything's fine, she had a nightmare" Mike replied.

Karen was a little surprised to see her son holding this mysterious girl like this. Like he was trying to protect her or comfort her. She was also a little proud she knew she'd raised him to be a gentleman.

"El, this is my mom," Mike told her urging her to lift her face from his shoulder.

Eleven grabbed a fist full of his t-shirt telling him she didn't want to. She was content where she was she felt safe.

"She's a little shy," Mike shrugged.

"It's alright, what's your name?" Karen asked, she was interested in

meeting Mike's new friend.

There was no response.

"Her name is El- ah- Eleanor," Mike replied trying to save his blunder. He knew his mom would be suspicious if he told her that he was friends with a girl named after a number "We call her El."

At last Eleven sat up straight reveling her face. Her eyes were an irritated pink and her cheeks were flush from the sobbing fit she's just had. She noticed a sizable wet patch on Mike's shoulder and ran her finger over it.

"Sorry," she sniffed.

"Don't worry about it El," Mike replied.

Karen suddenly grabbed Mike by the shoulder and rather violently yanked him backwards. He wasn't able to catch his footing and fell straight on to the floor. He was shocked when his mom dragged him a couple feet across the floor, he didn't know she was that strong. El looked just as shocked as he was. She lifted her hand for him and he wanted so badly to go back to her.

"I don't know what you've done or what you want, but you stay away from my son!" Karen barked defensively.

Eleven shuttered at the woman's threatening tone. She saw pure rage in her eyes and receded into the head board backing away as far as she could.

"Mom you're scaring her!" Mike exclaimed.

He climbed to his feet but before he could walk back towards the girl cowering on the bed he was grabbed by the back of his collar.

"Mike you don't know this girl like you think you do. She's dangerous; she escaped from a high security psychiatric hospital. Who knows what she's done or what she'll do." Karen whispered.

"Let me guess Dr. Brenner told you that?" Mike rolled his eyes.

"Michael what have you been getting yourself into?" Karen asked in shock.

"She's not dangerous mom, she saved my life. Brenner is the bad guy. She didn't escape from a psych ward she escaped from that lab, Hawkins international. They took her from her parents when she was a baby and did all sorts of experiments on her. She's not dangerous. She's just misunderstood and abused and scared," Mike replied glancing over his shoulder at Eleven who was now crying again.

Mike broke away from his stunned mother and took his place back on the bed "El, would you ever hurt me?"

Eleven gasped quietly and a painful sob raked her chest. She would never hurt him, ever. She had hurt Lucas and but she didn't mean to. Was he afraid of her? After he saw what she did to the bad men. She wouldn't be able to handle it if Mike was afraid of her. She was a monster she hurt people really badly, but she would never hurt Mike. He was her friend. She shook her head rapidly her eyes pleading with him to know the truth.

"It's okay El, please stop crying," Mike sighed sadly.

He couldn't stand watching her cry. Sometimes Holly would cry and scream for forty minute stints and it annoyed him to no end. This was different when Eleven cried he felt like crying too. He stroked her back gently. He felt a jolt of electricity run up his arm when he touched her bare skin where the gown parted. She scooted closer to him and he felt heat rush to his face.

"See mom she won't hurt me," Mike stated "I mean look at her,"

Karen studied the terrified girl clinging to her son. She couldn't help but feel guilty. Eleven's wide brown eyes provoked that feeling naturally in most people. It was like one of her super powers was melting hearts.

"Show me proof," she inclined, no matter how sweet the girl looked she needed more than just that. Her son could be in danger.

Mike thought for a moment then came up with an idea.

"El, can you show her your wrist?" he asked.

She nodded hesitantly. Mike took her hand and outstretched it palm up for his mother to see the numbers 011 tattooed on her wrist.

"Would a patient from a psychiatric hospital be branded?" he questioned.

Karen inspected to mark a little shocked to see it. She reached out for Eleven's arm and she immediately tried to retreat. Mike held her hand in place gently rubbing his thumb across her palm to reassure her. Karen repeated a similar motion over her wrist only for a very different purpose. She continued to rub until Eleven cringed the friction starting to burn. Mike was right, a psychiatric hospital wouldn't have tattooed the poor girl and in this day and age they no longer shaved the patient's heads. Could she really have been a government experiment?

"I'm sorry I scared you, I was scared too." Karen apologized.

"It's okay," Eleven whispered.

Mike felt her leaning against him and she started to nod off. She blinked rapidly she didn't want to fall asleep again she was afraid she'd have another nightmare.

"Mike I think we should get going, let her get some rest," Karen stated.

"No," Eleven gasped grabbing a hold of Mike's sleeve. He couldn't leave her he promised.

Mike winced attempting to free his forearm from Eleven's vise like grip. He was sure he'd have marks where her nails dug into his skin.

"Mom can't I stay a little longer?" Mike asked.

Karen just nodded knowing she wasn't getting him out of that room without a fight.

Eleven snuggled into his shoulder resting against him for support and closed her eyes. Mike felt another blush of embarrassment rush to his

cheeks. But there was also a very different feeling. Another warmth and this one was very pleasant. Despite his mom standing right there probably contemplating giving him "the talk" once again Mike didn't want to push her away. He wondered briefly what he would do if she fell asleep on him, but decided to deal with that if and when it happened.

"El you should try to go back to sleep," Mike whispered to her.

"No," she mumbled.

He had a feeling her body wouldn't comply with her protest.

"The more you rest the faster you'll get better. Then you can come home and all of this will be over. You could be normal, just like everybody else. No more lab no more experiments." Mike promised her.

"Normal," El repeated barley awake. She liked the sound of that. No more lab no more experiments she would be just like everybody else. That was exactly what she wanted.

Mike started to stroke her back gently. The small gesture was nearly enough to make her forget her fears and lull her to sleep.

Karen stepped out of the room feeling like she was intruding on something. She couldn't believe what she was seeing, what had happened in the last twenty our hours. This girl was supposedly an escapee from a secret movement lab? it was just too far-fetched to believe. But she seemed so innocent so scared and her son sure seemed smitten with her. She didn't know how to feel about that either.

"Karen," a voice snapped her back into reality.

She looked up to see Joyce Byers standing before her.

"Are you alright?" Joyce asked seeing her friend's troubled expression.

"I think my son is in love," Karen replied. When she realized what she said she shook her head and laughed slightly "Is that ridiculous? He's twelve years old."

"He's growing up," Joyce sighed "Mike has always had a big heart, I don't think he can help it."

"He's growing up too fast if you ask me. This week made me realize I have no idea what he's been doing or who he's been with or where he's been-" Karen stopped when she realized what she just said. She couldn't complain about not being on the best terms with her son when talking to the woman who just lost hers. "Joyce I'm so sorry,"

"It's okay, really. I have a feeling that things are about to get a lot better." Joyce replied leaving out major details that would take a lot of explaining. Before Karen could ask questions she charged the subject "How's Eleven holding up? Poor girl she almost died tonight"

"Who?" Karen questioned oblivious.

Joyce bit her lip realizing Mike must have introduced the girl as "El" a short abbreviation of her name. That defiantly seemed a lot less strange.

"Her name isn't really Eleanor is it?" Karen sighed.

"Do you know what happened to her in her early childhood?" Joyce asked cautiously.

"Part of it, I'm not sure I believe it. I mean it's just too strange and horrible. What could the government possibly want with a little girl? Whatever happened to her she's terrified and she and Mike are attached by the hip. I just wish I knew more about her. I feel guilty for thinking she'd be capable of hurting him but he's my son I have to be skeptical you know?" Karen rambled on.

"You don't have to be worried Karen. She's the sweetest most considerate girl you'll ever meet. She's just afraid." Joyce replied.

"I think I need to go for a walk, let this sink in," Karen sighed.

"You should, I'll tell Mike, I was just about to go visit anyways," Joyce offered. She didn't want to admit it but she was happy for Karen to leave. She didn't want to have to explain how her son came back to life though she knew eventually she'd have to.

She was a little shocked to see the proximity of the two when she entered the room. She wondered briefly how she would feel if that were Will. But being twelve and romantically involved was a hell of a lot better than being dead.

"How's Will?" Mike asked.

"He's sick, but he's going to be okay," Joyce smiled "How is she?"

"She's tired, really tired. I don't think she's ever used her powers that much. It's going to take her awhile to feel better again." Mike replied as he pulled the blanket around her tighter "El, are you still awake?"

A small moan was all he got in response.

"Ms. Byers is here, and Will's okay," Mike informed her.

"The doctors say that it's okay for you to go see him if you want," Joyce stated. "Lucas and Dustin just got here, they're with him already."

"Really? El do you think it'd be okay if I left for just a few minutes to go see Will? I'll come right back," Mike asked.

She lifted her head to look at him "I want to go too,"

"No El, you have to stay in bed," Mike replied.

"But you promised you wouldn't leave," She frowned her bottom lip pouting out slightly.

The hurt in her eyes tugged on his heart. He had promised her he wouldn't leave but he meant he wouldn't leave while she was sleeping. The hospital would kick him out eventually if his mother didn't drag him out by his ear first. He really wanted to see Will but he resented the thought of making her sad or even worse making her cry. He couldn't handle seeing her cry again and he would never forgive himself if he caused her tears. He'd done it before and would always regret it.

"El," he sighed "I know I did, but I didn't mean I'd never leave. I'll have to leave eventually I won't have a choice. I meant I'll always come back, I'll always be there for you even if I'm not actually there."

She nodded, his words made her feel safe. But she didn't like that he had to leave her side, even if he promised he'd come back. There was something about Mike whenever he was around she felt untouchable.

"Is that okay El? Maybe Ms. Byers can stay here with you," Mike suggested.

"I'd be happy to," Joyce replied giving the girl a small smile.

Eleven looked from Mike to Joyce and then back again. Joyce had been very nice to her, acting like the mother she'd never had. Though she'd rather Mike she did trust Joyce.

"Okay," She nodded.

Mike gently pushed on her shoulder telling her to lie down and pulled the thin blanket over her.

"I'll be right back El, I promise," Mike reassured her before he left.

El felt like he dragged a piece of her heart away with him. She sighed sadly and Joyce pulled a chair up to the bed.

"I know I've already told you this, but I just can't thank you enough for what you did for Will. If it weren't for you he might not have made it out of that place. You're a hero, I hope you know that," Joyce told her.

Hero, she remembered that word. Dustin called her a super hero once and Mike told her that it meant a person who uses their special powers to save people. But she knew she wasn't that. She had used her powers to hurt people. She had killed people and she opened the gate that let the Demogorgon take Will away and kill Barbra.

"No, not a hero," she sniffed "A monster."

Joyce just blinked "What? No, oh sweetie no. You're not a monster, what made you think that?"

"I- I hurt people, really bad, I'm bad," El replied, she couldn't look Joyce in the eye, she was too ashamed.

"Who did you hurt?" Joyce asked.

"Bad men," Eleven whispered.

"And what did these "bad men" do that was so bad? Why do you call them that?" Joyce questioned.

"They made me do bad things. Put me in the dark place," She muttered. She suddenly got an image of Mike, Dustin and Lucas struggling in the arms of the bad men guns aimed at them. "They tried to hurt my friends."

"Sweetheart if they did all those things then doesn't it make sense that they're the monsters?" Joyce questioned "You were only trying to protect your friends and yourself."

Eleven thought about it for a moment and it sort of made sense. But she still killed someone and no matter who they were or what they'd done she'd taken a life and that was wrong.

"El, that's what you like to be called right?" Joyce asked after a moment.

Eleven nodded.

"Well what if I told you I knew your birth name?" Joyce placed a comforting hand on her thigh.

"What?" El questioned.

"Your birth name, the name your mom gave you when you were born," Joyce explained.

She was intrigued she never thought about having another name. A normal name "Tell me,"

"Your mom, before you were taken, she decided to call you Jane," Joyce replied.

She wasn't sure if she liked it, she liked it when Mike called her "El". But putting names aside she only had one question.

"Where is she?" Eleven asked.

"Your mom? She lives in the next town over with your aunt," Joyce told her withholding the fact that her mother was mentally ill.

"I want to see her," El stated eagerly.

"You will Sweetie, as soon as you get better I'll make sure of it," Joyce promised. The girl had stolen her heart she wanted to protect her and give her the life she never had but so deserved. To Joyce she was almost like the daughter she never had.

"Joyce. Can I talk to you for a minuet?" I voice asked from behind her.

She turned to see Hopper standing in the door way. He didn't look impressed but yet again he never did.

"I'll be just outside okay, I won't go anywhere," she said softly to the girl.

"Where have you been?" Joyce asked the police chief as she met him in the hall. He had rushed Will to the hospital then disappeared.

"It doesn't matter," Hopper replied passively "I'm here for the girl."

"She's not ready to leave yet, she's still very sick," Joyce stated.

"They'll take care of her," Hopper sighed.

"Who will?" Joyce asked, the girl needed more than an aspirin she needed serious medical help. Then it clicked "You better not be doing what I think you're doing."

"Joyce stay out of this, it isn't your fight," Hopper groaned, he was afraid of this.

"Like hell it is! You can't just take her back to- to that place with those people! For Christ sake Hop she's only a little girl" Joyce exclaimed, she wasn't quite yelling but she was tempted to.

"Quiet down would you! Listen I don't want to do this but I have no

choice. I made a deal they get the girl and you, Will and the boys stay safe." Hopper explained.

"I swear to god Hopper, if you lay a finger on the poor girl I'll tell the press everything. Every last detail," Joyce threatened.

"They'd never believe you," Hopper scoffed.

"My son just came back to life, I think I have a pretty good story," Joyce replied her voice low.

"You're putting yourself in danger Joyce, don't do this," Hopper tried to reason.

"What if she was your daughter, what would you do huh?" Joyce questioned.

He didn't say anything else.

"That's what I thought," she huffed then returned the room to find Eleven sleeping.

Joyce locked the door behind her, she wouldn't let him take her.

2. Chapter 2

Chapter two

The young and the sleepless

She watched silently admiring his every move. The others teased Mike about his looks. Whether it was him being deathly pale, his freckles or how scrawny he was there always seemed to be something to target him for. He saw himself as unattractive as well but to her he was absolutely perfect. She thought he was.. pretty? No that was the wrong word for a boy. She'd have to find out the right word so that she could tell him. After all he told her that she was pretty even if she didn't think so.

"El, Are you okay?" Mike asked his brow knitted together in concern. She'd just been staring off into space.

Eleven felt her cheeks go warm. Was this embarrassment? She didn't like it. She just nodded at him.

"You know, you don't have to be afraid to talk to me." Mike told her in that soft tone he only ever used with her.

Eleven smiled shyly looking down at her feet. She felt a strange feeling in her stomach, she only ever felt this way around Mike. She couldn't figure out why. She built up the courage to ask him something she'd been wondering.

"Mike?"

"Yeah?"

"Why aren't we friends?" she asked.

He looked confused "We are friends El,"

"But you said we're not friends. You said friends don't go to the snowball," she replied.

She watched as Mike's face turned red. Had she said something

wrong? Suddenly Mike began to choke uncontrollably grasping at his chest. His eyes turned panicked.

"Mike? Mike?!" El gasped, she put her hand in his back to comfort him and discovered his t-shirt was bloody.

She looked up to see a man with a gun.

"No!" Eleven shrieked.

Mike fell to the floor barley breathing blood was everywhere. She wanted to use her powers to get rid of the man but she couldn't. She collapsed and threw herself over Mike tears welling up. She couldn't save him, she couldn't save him.

"Help! Help!" she cried but no one heard her.

...

Eleven jolted upright looking around frantically.

"El look at me it's okay, you're safe," Mike whispered taking her hand.

She threw herself at him sobbing in fear and relief. Mike held her again stroking her back gently. She grabbed a hold of his shirt desperately, feeling he would disappear if she didn't hold on to him.

"Did you have another nightmare?" Mike asked her.

She just nodded unable to form words.

"Do you want to talk about it?" he questioned.

"No," Eleven sniffed barely audible.

She didn't want to talk about it, it was just too horrible. She'd been having dreams like that for the past few days. They always started differently but they all ended the same. With the bad men hurting Mike and her crying helplessly. She didn't know why she was having the dreams she just wanted them to stop. She had always had nightmares in fact she couldn't remember ever having a good dream. But these awful dreams about Mike scared her more than any dream

she'd ever had.

She lifted her head from Mike's shoulder upon hearing a strange sound. Almost like a squeaking but not quite, she couldn't place it. She saw Dustin standing in the doorway making said sound by puckering his lips. Lucas stood beside him laughing.

"Awww Mike's in wove'," Lucas teased.

"Shut up guys this isn't funny, she's really scared," Mike barked.

His defensiveness just made them laugh harder.

"Dude, you're like a small dog when you get angry. Lots of bark and no bite." Dustin replied.

Eleven just looked on in confusion as she did most of the time. She didn't know what "wove" was or why Dustin was making that weird sound or why they were laughing or why Mike's face was turning red. For once she'd just like to know what was going on.

"Why are you making fun of him?" El asked slightly defensive.

"Ah come on El, we're not really making fun of him. We're just teasing that's what friends do. And plus its kind of hilarious how head over heels Mike is," Dustin explained.

Mike's face turned an even deeper shade of red and Eleven looked from him to Dustin and back again.

"Mike is what?" she questioned.

"It means he has a huge crush on you," Dustin replied.

She just continued to stare in confusion. Sometimes what they said made absolutely no sense what so ever but it only seemed to be her who didn't understand.

"Dude seriously that's your explanation to her?" Lucas sighed shaking his head "It means he's falling in love with you."

"Do you guys exist just to make my life miserable?" Mike groaned

wishing his two friends would just leave.

They two boys broke into a laughing fit again.

"Your face is so red you can't even tell that you have freckles anymore!" Dustin hollered making both of them laugh even harder.

Mike just sighed in exasperation cupping his hand over his face. Eleven just sat there only a couple inches away. None of this helped her confusion at the situation. She already knew Mike loved her, what was so funny about it? She loved him too; she loved all her new friends. There just something about Mike that made it different. She decided to drop the subject. She couldn't sit up on her own much longer anyways. She leaned back in to Mike's shoulder and closed her eyes. That warm secure feeling washing over her again.

"Oh gag me with a spoon!" Lucas exclaimed finding the display of affection rather unpleasant to watch.

"El..." Mike sighed.

He didn't want to push her away. He liked having her so close and she didn't understand how she was making the scenario worse. It wasn't her fault she was doing what felt right to her what made her feel safe.

"Okay come on man, let's stop before his head explodes," Dustin chuckled "so how are feeling El?"

"Tired," Eleven replied not bothering to lift her head from Mike's shoulder.

"Maybe we should leave then," Lucas replied.

She didn't understand why whenever she said she was tired people always wanted to leave.

"Yeah maybe you should," Mike replied still a little bitter about the said "teasing".

"And leave you two alone, no way. Who knows what you'd do," Dustin laughed.

"Ah man! Come on I don't want those images in my head!" Lucas exclaimed.

"Hey," a voice said called from the hallway "Dead man walking here."

"Will, how'd you convince your mom to let you out of bed?" Mike asked as the boy entered the room via a wheelchair.

"She doesn't exactly know yet," Jonathan replied.

"Will," Eleven whispered looking up.

Mike pulled back more so she could see better "Yeah, this is Will. Although I guess technically you guys already met."

"You must be the all-powerful Eleven, they talk about you like you're a super hero," Will laughed.

There was that word again "Not a hero," she whispered.

Mike gave her an odd look; he certainly thought she was a hero. Before he could say anything Will started with his interjection to the statement.

"What? Eleven I don't know much about you, but you saved my life. You're my hero." Will told her.

"She kinda' saved all our asses," Dustin added.

She still didn't believe it and she looked at Mike. She didn't know what she hoped to find in his rich brown eyes but he somehow always made things better.

"Not bad?" she asked pointing to herself.

"No! no, El you're amazing," Mike replied a little shocked. How could she possible think she was bad?

She still didn't believe it.

A few seconds of silence passed and everyone just stared at each other or at a wall. Mike and Eleven seemed to be in a trance

captivated in each other's eyes.

"So did you really flip a van?" Will asked breaking the awkward silence.

She just nodded.

"Right over our heads!" Dustin exclaimed.

She didn't understand why they all thought it was so amazing. She just thought it really hurt. Three out of the four boys started to converse excitedly about the powers their new friend possessed but Mike just sat there. He stared at her in concern.

"Is everything okay El?" Mike asked her quietly.

She just nodded, he didn't believe her. He took her hand and ran his thumb over the back of it.

That night was extremely difficult; separating the two was not easy. Every patient had a right to one overnight guest. Mike was hasty to pull that card, but said guest had to be at least eighteen. So Joyce stayed with her running back and forth between her and Will the entire night. Joyce was very nice and so supportive but she just wasn't Mike.

Eleven barley slept afraid that she would have nightmares. Terrified that they would come true. She wanted Mike to stay with her for comfort and also because she worried about him. If he was there she knew that he wasn't lying face down in a ditch somewhere.

Mike didn't sleep either he just tossed and turned thinking about how scared she must have been. He kept picturing her waking up in terror not knowing where she was. He was terrified of the thought of her being alone. He knew that there was still bad men out there. Bad men that wanted her... bad men who wanted to take her away from him...

...

A week and a half had passed since strange things started happening in Hawkins. Will was back, Hawkins international lab seemed to be keeping a low profile, there was no sign of the Demogorgon and no

one else was dying or disappearing under mysterious circumstances. Still nothing was normal, things were... stranger at best.

An eerie feeling had settled over the small town. Now that a boy had come back to life miraculously the towns folk were a buzz asking all sorts of questions. Witch was a burden on the Byers family. But on the bright side people were so consumed with Will that no one would really take notice of the odd little girl with a buzz cut.

Mike on the other hand couldn't focus on anyone else. Even in school he would completely drift off thinking of her wishing he could be with her. He knew that at any moment Dr. Brenner and his men could swoop in and whisk El away. Him being there might not make a difference in the situation. But at least he could serve as a distraction to give Eleven a chance to escape.

He suddenly felt his elbow get shoved witch just happened to be holding his head up as he stared off dreamily. Needless to say he wound up bumping the side of his face off the desk top. He groaned rubbing his jaw and blushing profusely as class mates snickered.

"Dumb ass," Troy chuckled under his breath undoubtedly the one who had caused the incident.

"Why don't you say that to my face?" Mike whispered.

"Is everything okay back there?" Mr. Clarke asked pausing the lesson.

"We're all good, just bringing Wheeler back from his trip to lala land," James laughed.

"Do we mind paying attention to the lesson please, everyone," Mr. Clarke asked before continuing.

"Jerks," Lucas muttered.

Mike nodded in silent agreement, he could already feel the bruise coming in. fifteen minutes later the bell rang and as usual the four boys were the last to leave the class.

"Is it bad?" Mike asked rubbing his sore jaw.

"It's a good shade of purple Dude," Dustin replied.

"Great," Mike sighed sarcastically.

The four friends made their way to the door and just as they reached it they were interrupted.

"Mike could I talk to you for just a moment?" Mr. Clark asked.

"Yes," Mike replied looking at his feet. He knew this wouldn't be good
"You guys go ahead, I'll catch up."

Dustin, Lucas and Will continued on to their next class and Mike sheepishly walked over to the teacher's desk.

"What's going on Mike? I mean you're usually so focused, is everything okay?" Mr. Clark questioned.

"Everything is fine I just have some stuff going on at home, I'm really sorry I'll try harder to stay focused."

"It's alright, you're a good student. Just let me know if there's anything I do to help." Mr. Clark smiled.

"Thanks. Actually do you think you could maybe move my seat away from Troy Harrington?" Mike asked a little embarrassed to admit his troubles with the bully.

"I'll do that," Mr. Clark replied.

3:15 couldn't come soon enough that day and when the bell rang Mike was out the door almost instantly.

"Dude, what's the rush?" Dustin asked as they finally caught up with him at the bike rack.

"El is getting out of the hospital tonight, remember?" Mike replied as if it were obvious.

"Of course, it's always about the girlfriend," Lucas said rolling his eyes.

"She's not my girlfriend, and why are you so pissed off?" Mike asked.

Before he could replied Mike heard someone call his name from a distance. He turned just in time for Eleven to throw herself at him. He couldn't help but smile as she nuzzled her face in the crook of his neck.

"El, you almost knocked me over," Mike laughed as he hugged her back.

They pulled away from each other and he looked her over. She was wearing a pink sweater and nicely fitted blue jeans. She looked really nice, pretty.

"How'd you get here? I thought they weren't sending you home until later," Mike questioned.

"Joyce," El replied.

"Hey El," Will waved.

She waved back silently with a small smile. She liked Will he was really nice to her almost as nice as Mike. Joyce walked up smiling.

"I wish you kids would tell me where you get your energy from. She saw you from across the parking lot, sprinted all the way over here." Joyce laughed.

"Did you at least look for cars first?" Mike asked feeling a little protective.

She just shrugged; she wasn't used to cars let alone looking out for them.

"Are you ready to go? It's about a half hour drive," Joyce asked.

Eleven grinned and nodded, they were going to see her mother. She was ecstatic to say the least. Mike was going too because she had asked him to. They said good bye to Dustin, Lucas and Will and headed to the car. As they settled into the back seat Eleven caught sight of the purple bruise on Mike's jaw. She slid across the leather seat and gently touched the brightly tinted patch of skin.

"Mouth breather," she whispered studying the bruise with concern.

Mike shrugged away from her touch turning his head to hide the injury from her "Um yeah, yeah mouth breather. But I'm okay really, it's just a bruise."

"But you're hurt," Eleven said quietly.

"It only hurts when I touch it, really its fine," Mike replied.

"Mouth breather," Eleven whispered once again a hint of malice in her small voice.

Joyce slid into the driver's seat suddenly almost startling the two kids in the back seat.

"Ready?" Joyce smiled.

Eleven nodded just staring out the window into the grey November sky. It had gotten significantly colder in past few days. El definitely was not dressed for the weather. He watched out of the corner of his eyes as she pulled her sleeves over her hands. The engine roared to life snapping Mike back into reality. He reached for the seat-belt above Eleven's shoulder and pulled it across her lap. The back of his hand brushed her hip as he pulled away. An electric sensation shot up his arm and he pulled away quickly. Eleven felt the same feeling. Instead of blushing and pulling away from it she found it pleasant and wanted to pull him closer. The car lurched forward and Mike pulled his own seat belt on. He tried to ignore the feeling of El's thigh and shoulder pressing up against the side of his. The back seat was meant for three people and there was no need for them to be sitting so close. It just sort of happened and Eleven seemed comfortable so why complain.

"Mike," El whispered about five minutes into the drive.

"Yeah?" Mike turned to her trying to hide how uncomfortable the proximity was making him.

"What if she doesn't like me?" Eleven asked.

"Your mom?" Mike questioned.

She simply nodded.

"El she's your mom of course she's going to like you. She'll love you." Mike replied.

"You're sure?" Eleven asked.

"Yeah, El I don't think it's possible not to like you," Mike laughed.

The first night they met he'd tried so hard not to get attached to her. But he just couldn't help it. She just sucked him in to loving her. Just like she unknowingly did to everyone else who got to know her as El the kind hearted girl and not 011 the experiment.

The sun started to hang low on the horizon and Eleven watched the sunset as they drove through the country side. She seemed taken with the beauty of nature, she'd never seen a sunset during her time in the lab. Twelve long years and she had never seen outside. Mike was taken with a different beauty, hers. He couldn't stop staring at her and then he got that feeling again. An urge so strong it was like gravity pulling him to her. He felt a warm numbness overwhelm his senses and all he wanted was to hold her.

They were only ten minutes out from the Ives house when El got tired and laid her head on Mike's shoulder. His cheeks flushed slightly but he couldn't deny how good it felt to have her so close. She yawned and snuggled into him. Mike's breath caught in his throat. How was he so lucky? No no no, he wasn't lucky. El didn't even understand the significance of cuddling and hugging or even the kiss they shared in the cafeteria. But whether she understood and returned his feeling or not didn't matter. He was just lucky to have someone so extraordinary in his life.

The car rolled to a stop in front of a decent sized house. The looming dark prevented them from seeing the house's details properly but El didn't care. It was what or rather who was inside the house that mattered.

"Eleven sweetie, I know you're excited but you need to be calm and patient. Your mom doesn't know you're coming. It's going to take her a while to get used to the fact." Joyce explained.

Eleven nodded, she was so tempted to just run up to the house

They got out of the car and eleven grabbed Mike's hand.

"Don't be nervous," Mike whispered.

She was desperately trying not to be. She was so on edge that when Joyce rang the door bell the sound startled her slightly. They waited a few seconds though it felt much longer. Joyce tried knocking still no answer. It was strange, the lights were on and she could hear the TV from the living room. You could visibly see the hurt in the young girl's eyes.

"Becky, Terry, it's Joyce Byers!" Joyce called through the door.

Something just wasn't right, they knew she was coming they just didn't know why or who she was bringing. Joyce debated something for a moment and it only took one look at the saddened girl to make her decision. She knocked once more then tried the door. It opened on whiny hinges.

That night would be imprinted in Eleven's mind. Another emotional scar she would forever carry. As the door swung open they were met with the sight of Rebecca Ives carelessly sprawled out on the floor. Blood pooled around her head. Eleven screamed and without hesitation ran away from the door as fast as humanly possible. Mike sprinted after her trying to stop her before she hit the road. She wasn't sure where she was going she just had to get away from that house, far away. A loud prolonged droning sound startled her and glaring lights rendered her still. Mike grabbed her almost aggressively pulling her tight against his chest.

"What the hell is your god damn problem kid!? I should've hit you teach you a lesson!" a man yelled as he pulled around them in his car.

"Oh shut up!" Mike hollered back a bit shocked that he'd actually said it.

His heart was still pounding a mile a minute. He had gotten so many terrible images as he watched her dash into the middle of street as that car approached. She stared at him with wide eyes shaking like a

leaf, Tears threatened to spill over. Mike loosened his grip slightly turning his embrace from protective to comforting. Eleven threw her arms around him and sobbed in to his shoulder. He was all she had left.

"It's okay, it's going to be okay, it's okay El I'm here," Mike into her ear over and over again.

Her sobs violently racked her small body so hard that it looked painful. Mike's heart was breaking for her, he didn't know if she'd survive this.

"Mike take her to the car and lock the doors," Joyce called from the front porch.

"El come on let's go," Mike whispered.

He let her free from his tight embrace but she continued to cling to him. Mike took her hand separating it from its tight grip on his shirt and urged her forward. She followed him on unstable feet, she was in shock. She couldn't describe the feeling; it felt like someone had physically ripped her hope away from her. She just felt empty and pain and somewhere in the mix guilt.

Mike lead her to the car like Joyce said and locked the doors from the inside. Mike didn't know what to say or how to help her. She had her knees up hugging them tightly to her chest. Her hazel eyes were wide and she trembled uncontrollably. Her breathing was shallow and ragged.

He reached out and he barely touched her when she gasped and jumped practically out of her seat.

"I'm sorry, I'm sorry!" he gasped "I didn't realize that was going to scare you."

He hadn't seen her this on edge since the night they'd first met. He continued to stare at her at loss as for what to do. Tears dripped from her jaw creating a dark pink stippled parent on her sweater. He wanted to wipe some of the fresh droplets away. But after her previous reaction to being touched he wasn't so sure that was a good

idea.

"El, what should I do? How can I help you?" Mike asked softly.

She shook her not making eye contact with him.

"What does that mean?" he questioned.

"Can't," she murmured her gaze somewhere distant, lost in another world of her own mental torment.

"I can't," he repeated to himself. He felt tears prick behind his eyes but he refused to let them past.

Just then Joyce returned, she unlocked the driver's side door and sunk down into the seat. Mike could tell from her posture there was no good news. Terry and Becky Ives were dead. Eleven was an orphan...

3. Chapter 3

Chapter three

What Are Friends For?

An hour passed and the car was eerily silent. Joyce waited outside waiting for Jonathan to arrive and take Mike and Eleven home. She called Hopper and after their last meeting she didn't want Eleven to be anywhere near him. She didn't know what had gotten into him but he was acting like a completely different person. She glanced back at the girl waiting in the backseat. Joyce sighed she knew what it was like to lose your mother. Eleven was only twelve years old and she had already been through more trauma than most adults would ever face. Joyce just wanted for the girl to be safe and happy.

Mike just stared at his hand clasped in his lap. He was beside himself with his current situation. Eleven remained curled up against the door hugging her knees to her chest. She had calmed considerably but once every few minutes he heard her snuffle. He felt awful for just sitting there but she wouldn't talk to him she wouldn't even let him hug her. It was almost like she had reverted back into the timid girl he'd found in the forest two and half weeks ago.

"Mike," she whispered finally breaking the silence.

His head shot up to look at her. He was surprised that she had spoken but relieved. They made eye contact staring at each other for a moment. Her face was blotchy from crying and her eyes displayed a feeling a sorrow.

"I'm cold," she spoke again looking away from his gaze.

It was becoming late in the month of November and the sun had gone down a long time ago. Even inside the car there was a biting chill and her sweater was thin. Mike slid his jacket off leaned over to wrap it around her shoulders. The fabric was warm from his body heat and it was a welcome feeling but now he was only a t-shirt.

"But you'll get cold," she whispered.

"It's okay, I'll be fine." Mike replied. He was already feeling the air nipping at the exposed skin on his arms but she needed his coat more than he did. It wouldn't have been the first time he'd given up his comfort for hers.

She pulled the jacket tighter around her, it smelled like him too. She felt bad for taking it from him.

"Why are you so nice to me?" she asked.

He found it to be an odd question but gave the answer he felt was obvious anyways "because we're friends, friends would do anything for each other,"

Now she had a completely different question "You said we aren't friends."

"When did I say that?" Mike questioned but remembered soon after and felt like slapping himself.

"You said you're not my friend or my brother. What are you?" she continued to press him.

He sighed he could feel his cheeks getting red again. It should have been easy to spit out the word boyfriend but he just couldn't say it. Not without knowing she understood the full meaning that word held. Not until he knew that she understood and wanted the kind of emotion that title involved. He couldn't say it because he didn't know if she felt the same way. He felt stuck and just like in the cafeteria he began to stutter. The feeling he had was identical to how he felt that night. His palms were sweaty his mouth was dry and he felt somewhat faint. One thing was for sure he was absolutely NOT going to kiss her this time. He shouldn't have done that at the time he wasn't going to do it again. Not until she understood what it meant. But there was a part of him that wanted to.

Before he could find something to say the door opened and Jonathan was standing there.

"You guys okay?" he asked "My mom is pretty shaken up,"

"We'll be fine," Mike replied. But he wasn't sure, he wasn't sure Eleven

would be okay.

"Are you ready to go?" Jonathan questioned.

Mike looked back at El who looked down clutching his coat around her shoulders.

"El we're leaving now, Jonathan is going to take us home," Mike told her.

"Home," she whispered, she didn't know if she had a home.

Mike insisted that she would live with him but after meeting Mrs. Wheeler she wasn't so sure she'd be welcome.

They got into the back of Jonathan's car and as they settled in Will peered over the front seat.

"Hi guys," Will greeted quietly, he knew what had happened and didn't know how to handle it "I'm really sorry El, about what happened."

"Not a good time," Jonathan whispered to him nudging his thigh gently.

Will nodded seeing Eleven's somber expression. He just wanted to help his friend. He felt like he had to protect her, she was the reason he was still alive. But it was strictly platonic, like she was his sister. He could tell how Mike felt about her. Although Mike was far from strong Will had no doubt he could and would pummel him if he went after his girl.

In the back seat personal space was non-existent. Eleven had gotten as close as possible to Mike without sitting in his lap. Instead of sitting rigidly this time he wrapped his arm around her shoulders. He allowed himself to slouch into her form just as she did to him. This was much less uncomfortable, pleasant even. He would allow himself this one selfish moment.

A couple minutes into the drive she was starting to nod off to sleep. He could tell that her exhaustion would soon take her.

"You can go to sleep," Mike whispered "it'll take us a while to get back."

She didn't respond but soon enough she was dead weight against his shoulder. He could feel a slight rise and fall with her breaths and he listened to the soft sound. He found himself staring at her while she slept and recalled an old conversation he'd had with Nancy.

"Guys are supposed to watch the girl they love while she's sleeping, it's romantic,"

"It's really creepy is what it is,"

"You'll understand when you feel that way about a girl,"

"When that day comes I want you to shoot me,"

It looked like Nancy had an excuse to shoot him now. Only he no longer felt that way. He wasn't sure that staring at her while she slept was any less creepy than he'd originally thought. But he just couldn't help himself. He realized that the idea of having a girlfriend and everything it entailed was no longer gross but something he was beginning to want very badly. But unlike other boys his age that would jump at the first girl they found pretty his eyes were only for her. She was the first girl he'd ever felt that way about. He decided he was okay with the way he felt and he would be okay if she didn't feel the same. Or at least he would act that way. He would be anything she needed him to be.

It wasn't terribly late when they arrived back in Hawkins but El was still sleeping by the time they pulled up in the Byers' drive way. She looked so peaceful slouched against his shoulder. Mike didn't want to wake her and bring her back to the cruel world they lived in. They couldn't just stay in the car the light snow from earlier had now become a blizzard. The car would quickly become like a refrigerator without the heat running.

"El, wake up we're home," Mike said softly moving his shoulder slightly to wake her.

She stirred for a few seconds then her soft brown eyes blinked open

sleepily. She stared up at him for a few moments more. Trying to rid the sleep away and make sense of what was happening around her. She slept really well, no nightmares. This strange to her, something new but not unwanted.

"Come on, let's go inside," Mike whispered.

He opened the door and a bitter gust of wind came rushing in. Mike stood and she followed him into the swirling white. She felt guilty when she saw him standing there in just a t-shirt. Before she could try to give his coat back he led her to the house. By the time they got inside the wind had gnawed at his bare skin leaving a numb feeling. Eleven saw him rub his arms trying to warm himself. She took the coat off of her shoulders and draped it back onto his. She knew she felt warm whenever they hugged so she did just that. This caught him off guard and he stood frozen for a second. He had to convince himself that an innocent hug was not taking advantage of her and enjoy the feeling of her arms wrapped tightly around his waist. He held her back and smiled slightly.

"Thanks El," Mike grinned as he tried to pull back to look at her.

She wouldn't move she just snuggled closer. He noticed that he was now comforting her and not the other way around. This changed everything and rather than sheepishly pulling away Mike held her tighter.

"I'm sorry this happened to you El," he whispered just loud enough for her to hear.

"It's not your fault," Eleven whimpered fighting off tears. She didn't want to cry again but whenever she tried not to it never worked.

"I know, I just feel sorry that I can't do anything to make it better. I'm sorry that you're sad because it makes me feel sad too," Mike explained.

She pulled back quickly looking at him with a pained stare.

"I don't want you to be sad, I make you sad?" she asked the first tear slipped down her cheek.

"No no it's not like that. It's just because when you care about someone seeing them in pain makes you feel the same way they do." He replied.

She understood. She'd felt that happen to her when she saw the devastated look on Mike's face the night they found Will's "body". She wasn't used to anyone feeling anything other than hatred towards her. And she wasn't used to feeling anything other than fear and pain. There were a small group of people who cared about her now but she was stuck on the fact that Mike was different. She couldn't explain it but the way she felt about him was something completely unique from what she felt for anyone else. Maybe he felt this way too. Was he as confused about it as she was? Not her friend, not her brother and definitely not an enemy she had run out of definitions. Was there a title she was missing, there must have been. After all she hadn't known what a friend was until a few weeks ago.

The silence was becoming uncomfortable. She realized that she should say something else but she didn't know what. Mike reached up suddenly and ran his thumb gently over her cheek drying the few tears that strayed. She placed her hand over his holding it there. She liked the way his palm felt resting against the side of her cheek.

They were so different but an identical emotion for each other united the two. But even where they were the same there were differences. El acted on impulse, she did what felt good. Mike held back and ignored what he wanted. But god it would've been so easy to kiss her in that moment... he didn't.

Will stepped around the corner wondering what was taking them so long at the door. He blushed crimson when he saw the moment he'd intruded on. Mike had the same reaction upon seeing him and retracted his hand hastily. He regretted it immediately when he saw hurt flash in Eleven's eyes.

"You guys okay?" Will asked sheepishly.

Mike just nodded.

"You can come sit down. you don't have to just stand there," Will said trying to lighten the heavy awkwardness that shrouded the room.

"We'll be right there," Mike replied.

Will got the message that he should leave them so he returned to the living room.

El hesitantly reached out for Mike's hand once again. To her relief he laced his fingers with hers and squeezed them gently.

...

Joyce seemed to find lost in thought a lot as of late. Maybe a result of her being so on edge for the few weeks. That month had definitely been the most eventful time of her life. She was worried about Will. She should've expected for his experience to have a lasting impact but he had just been acting so strange. He used to be very interactive with her. Now he stayed in his room unless told to do otherwise and he barely talked. She was worried about Jonathan. The eldest Byers child had always seemed to take a back seat to his brother. Though he didn't mind because he always put Will before himself as well. Joyce worried that she hadn't been paying adequate attention to the seventeen year old. She worried a lot about little Eleven the poor girl had been through so much and now she was an orphan. Joyce's mind was a mess of activity to say the least.

She snapped out of her mental trance when she saw Jim Hopper emerge from the Ives house. She stepped from the safety of the car into the harsh winter wind.

"What's going on?" she asked quietly as he approached.

Hopper sighed "Single shot to the head, both of them. The gun was planted on Terry to make it look like a murder and suicide,"

Joyce gasped in shock at the statement "Are you sure?"

"I know Brenner's work when I see it," Hopper scowled. He hated that man with a passion and despised what he was now a part of but he had no choice.

"You say that but then you go back to the lab and play errand boy for him? You're a cop Hopper you're supposed to protect people," Joyce replied angrily.

"I am protecting people! I'm protecting you and your son!" Hopper snapped.

"And throwing everyone else under the god damn bus! Including a defenseless little girl!" Joyce retorted raising her voice slightly.

"You know as well as I do that she isn't defenseless. You're not going to be able to stop him Joyce. Brenner killed Terry for a reason so that the girl would have nowhere left to go. She's an orphan and the second she goes into the system he'll know about it and he'll come for her." Hopper told her bluntly.

"She doesn't have to go into the system; I'll take her for god's sake. Anything is better than her going back to that place!" Joyce exclaimed.

"You're going to take her in? Joyce you're a single mother of two boys, you're a single income family with a full house. How is this possibly going to work?" Hopper asked incredulously. Though he knew that Joyce of all people could find a way.

"I'll find a way I've done it before!" Joyce replied. Everyone said almost the exact same thing when Lonnie left her for a younger woman. Jonathan was six and Will had barely started walking. She made it work then and she could do it again.

"He's never going to stop. Brenner will do anything to get that girl back and your obsession with her is going to get you killed," Hopper sighed trying to change her mind. He knew it wouldn't work. Joyce was way too stubborn for that.

"He wouldn't. If one more person goes missing or dies in Hawkins it's going to send the town and surrounding cities into panic. There's enough evidence to lead back to him. He's a monster but he's not stupid and neither am I." Joyce stated "I'm done with conversation just never come near me again."

The roads were nasty driving back into Hawkins it made the trip twice as long as it should've been. She thought about finding another pay phone so she could check on the kids let them know she'd be home soon. But she could already hear Jonathan saying she should've

kept driving. That everything was fine and sooner she got home the better. When Joyce finally arrived home she was met with the unusual sound of silence. She walked to the living room to find Will, Mike and Eleven all sound asleep. She found it odd it was only going on 8:00. She supposed that witnessing something so emotionally scarring would be exhausting. She was tired too. Will hadn't seen what Mike and Eleven had but Will was always tired as of late. That worried her too. She sighed and turned around almost walking right into Jonathan.

"God you scared me, you shouldn't sneak up on me like that. I'm getting old you know." Joyce said humorously.

"You're only forty," Jonathan laughed.

"Forty one thanks for trying to make me feel better," Joyce replied "Have they been like this for long?"

"I came in to check on them about twenty minutes ago and they were all passed out." Jonathan stated "I already called Mrs. Wheeler she says its fine that Mike stays the night."

"What would I do without you?" Joyce smiled.

"Well I'm sure you would have burned the house down by now," Jonathan joked.

"Oh haha mom's cooking jokes, those never get old," Joyce laughed.

She glanced over her shoulder to see Eleven curled up in the fetal position sleeping soundly. Joyce sighed sadly. She couldn't stop the empathy she felt for the poor girl. It just broke her heart, everything she'd been through.

"Did you happen to notice how Eleven is holding up?" Joyce asked.

"She just cuddled up to Mike all night until she fell asleep. She wouldn't eat or drink anything she just seemed really depressed." Jonathan replied, the state of girl saddened him as well even though he'd only seen her a handful of times.

"I was afraid of that," Joyce sighed.

The girl's mental state was of concern of course but one look at the girl showed that she wasn't healthy. It was obvious the lab didn't feed her properly. Blood work from the hospital was not good. To no surprise she was very malnourished and the doctor said she was teetering on the edge of being anemic. She was fifteen pounds under weight for her age group. For a young girl in the early stages of puberty those were very serious health risks. The fact that she was refusing to eat was of immediate concern.

"She's going to be staying with us isn't she?" Jonathan asked but it was more of a statement. He knew his mother all too well to think the girl was going anywhere. He didn't mind he just worried about the stress it could cause his mother.

"She has nowhere else to go. I know it's sudden but I can't just leave her," Joyce replied.

"It's okay; you're doing the right thing." Jonathan assured her.

"Thank you, I don't know how I got so lucky. I have the most amazing kids." Joyce smiled.

She knew that Will and Jonathan wouldn't mind. She had taught them to see the world as she did after all. She just feared that they may begin to feel neglected; she would have to make sure that didn't happen.

A small whimper interrupted their conversation. Joyce instinctively turned back to make sure Eleven was alright. She girl shifted around in her sleep then suddenly kicked her leg out catching Mike in the thigh. The boy who had been sleeping on the opposite side of the couch woke slightly startled. He smiled when he saw what had happened.

Whatever had been bothering El seemed to have past thankfully. Mike adjusted her blanket to cover her better and settled back on his side and the couch. He didn't take notice the two people observing him from the kitchen. Maybe his obliviousness was due to fact he was barley awake or maybe it was because he was just too absorbed by Eleven.

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The next morning Mike woke up on the floor, it turned out that Eleven was an extremely restless sleeper. She had kicked him a few times and then stretched her feet out over his lap. He eventually decided it would better for both of them if she had the couch to herself.

Mike moaned softly stretching out with a yawn. He was stiff from sleeping on the floor but his right thigh was especially sore. Despite this the sight of her sleeping soundly made him smile. At some point she'd switched the side of the couch she was lying on. He wondered briefly if that was a conscious decision on her part.

"Did she kick you off?" a voice asked from behind him.

Mike turned to see Will sitting in the arm chair with a pad of paper and a pencil, typical.

"Literally," Mike replied.

"I've been watching her, she's been tossing and turning a lot," Will smiled staring at the slumbering girl with soft eyes.

For just a split second Mike felt a pang of jealousy strike his heart. But it was ridiculous wasn't it? Will couldn't have feelings for her too, could he? There was a part of him that said she was his and only his no one else could have her. But that wasn't fair to El.

"Oh hey, look who's up," Will laughed.

Mike looked back to see Eleven stretching out with her arms spread over her head. Mike smiled at the sight he found this just adorable. She sat up and looked down at him her brown eyes still tired.

"Good morning El," Mike greeted with a warm smile.

"Mike," she whispered, her voice was very starchy almost restricted.

"Oh, are you sick?" Mike asked his features turning concerned.

"No more hospital," she objected and she did indeed sound very sick.

"No not that kind of sick," Mike replied.

He stood and stepped over to her placing a gentle hand to her forehead.

"El you're burning up," he sighed.

She gave him an odd look, she felt cold.

"You have a fever; it's when your body gets hot for no reason," he explained "Will can you get your Mom?"

Will put down his drawing and left the room with a concerned expression.

It still didn't make sense, she felt really cold her throat really hurt and her head was throbbing.

"It's okay, you should lie back down," Mike told her.

She didn't want lie down although she was very tired. Joyce and Will walked back into the room and Joyce came right over to her. She knelt down in front the couch and repeated what Mike had done. She didn't know what they got from touching her forehead but it seemed to tell them something.

"Are you not feeling good Sweetie?" Joyce asked though she knew the answer.

Eleven just shook her head. She was a girl of few words but this time it was due to fact that it hurt to talk.

"Hold on one second I'll be right back." Joyce said as she stood "Will can you get her some water please?"

Mother and son walked off again.

"Don't worry; you probably just have a cold. It'll go away on its own in a few days," Mike reassured her.

"A cold?" she asked trying to ignore the searing in the back of her throat.

"Yeah, you get a fever your head hurts your throat gets sore and nose stuffs up. It makes you feel awful but it happens to people all the time. They call it that because you can get it from being out in the cold for too long." He explained.

Will returned with a glass of cold water and she sipped at it. It helped the pain in her throat a little but it didn't go away. She was glad that this was considered to be normal. She didn't have to go back to the hospital or anything but she did not like it. She'd never felt this way before.

Joyce walked back into the living room with a thermometer in hand. Upon seeing the long thin object the girl became visibly uneasy.

"What wrong? What's scaring you?" Mike asked calmly.

"Needle?" she asked in a hoarse whisper.

"No Honey, no, it's not a needle. It's a thermometer it goes in your mouth and takes your temperature. It won't hurt I promise." Joyce assured her. She displayed the object to her "See it's not sharp,"

Eleven nodded calming down, she hated needles. Up close this looked nothing like one but from across the room it had her fooled. It was still uncomfortable though. She didn't like the way it felt under her tongue and it had to stay there for a long time. But she would take it over a needle any day.

When Joyce took the thermometer back she studied it for a second she sighed.

"Well you'll live, but you're definitely sick," she stated.

She did have a high fever. Nothing that warranted a trip to the hospital thank god but she would have to monitor it closely.

"Sweetie do you know how to swallow pills," Joyce questioned.

She did, that was something she knew how to do very well something she had been taught at the age of six. Papa used to make her take pills on a regular basis. He told her that it would make her stronger. Once she figured out that the pills were responsible for the dizzy

drowsy feeling she had most the time she refused to swallow them. She would hold them under tough and in her cheek and try to spit them out. That's when they started giving her needles and there was no way out of that. Either way medicine was bad she knew better than to think it would help her.

"El are you okay?" Mike asked bringing her back from her reverie.

"No," she replied quietly.

"No, you're not okay?" Mike questioned.

"No pills," she whispered.

"El, remember here is nothing like the lab. Okay, you're safe here. This medicine is different it's going to help you." Mike reassured her.

Joyce was struggling with an idea a theory she hoped to god she was wrong about. But it wasn't a far stretch to believe that the lab had dosed Eleven with LSD. It would explain her fear of needles and her aversion to medicine. A child wouldn't understand let alone enjoy the effects of a serious drug like that. If she was right Eleven could have been facing developmental problems. Witch could mean that her reduced speech was not just psychological.

"El you know we would never hurt you right?" Will questioned.

Eleven nodded but she never looked away from Mike. She reached over and took his hand for comfort making him blush and look away sheepishly.

"So you'll take it?" Will asked.

Eleven tightened her grip on Mike's hand and he nodded at her reassuringly. She trusted him more than anyone.

"Yes," El whispered.

"Good," Joyce smiled softly at her before leaving the room once again. She couldn't stop mulling over that idea in her head. Drugging up a child for an experiment, it made her blood boil.

"Make yourself comfortable okay," Mike told her. He felt bad for her after all she'd been through and now she was sick. It was very minuscule on the scale of hardships she'd been through. Almost not comparable but it still sucked.

"No wonder you're sick," Will sighed.

"What?" Mike questioned.

"Think about it, she spent the first twelve years of her life in a sterile environment. Her immune system is probably next to non-existent" Will explained.

Mike hadn't thought of that but it made perfect sense. He was expecting Eleven to ask him what Will was talking about. Instead she just lied down again never releasing his hand. She was too tired to care about things she didn't understand.

That morning was tough on Eleven and not just because she was sick. There was a normalcy that drifted in air. A normalcy she felt didn't fit having found out that her only family had been murdered the night before. Her mother's death pained her of course. But she was struggling with the fact that it didn't hurt her as badly as she thought it should have. She should've been a crying mess unable to smile, like Mike after he thought Will had died. Sure she was hysteric for first hour or so but it didn't last. Maybe she was a bad person maybe there was something wrong with her.

It was hard on the others around her. Seeing her lying there sick with a lost look on her delicate features. They kept trying to get her to eat something but she refused. But she was drinking a lot of water and her fever stayed down. Those were good signs at least.

She spent a lot of the day on the couch resting. Will and Mike attempted to teach her how to play cards but she liked watching them better, it was less confusing. After lunch when she did not eat the boys decided to invite Lucas and Dustin to join them. She fell asleep before they could arrive.

"Hey what gives all three of you over here and not inviting me to the party?" Dustin exclaimed as he entered the Byers' living room.

"Shh! She's sleeping," Mike barked.

Eleven rolled over, now facing the couch cushions but she didn't wake.

"What's up with her?" Dustin asked.

"She's sick," Mike answered as he fixed Eleven's blanket.

"Oh barf! Stop staring at her like that," Lucas sneered.

"Well if she's sick then you know we're all screwed," Dustin stated as he took a seat on the floor.

"What do you mean?" Will asked.

"If she's sick then you know Mike's going to wind up with it and as we all know from the chicken pox epidemic of 81 when Mike gets sick we all get screwed over," Dustin explained.

"Okay how was all of us getting chicken pox my fault? It would've happened no matter what it was all over school I just happened to get it first." Mike replied.

"Exactly you got it first and then you gave it to us, that makes it your fault," Dustin replied.

"It's not like I meant to, and how do you know El's going to get me sick first. Will has been here all day too." Mike questioned.

"Yeah but you and El are special," Dustin said wiggling his eyebrows suggestively.

"What is that supposed to mean?" Mike asked though he knew fully well.

"Oh come on don't act like you two don't suck face when no one's around," Dustin laughed.

"We do not," Mike rolled his eyes.

"But you've at least kissed," Dustin continued.

Mike paused for a moment before objecting and that was enough to tell them the truth.

"Holy shit, have you?!" Dustin shouted.

"Quiet!" Mike exclaimed.

"Well have you?" Dustin pressed.

"Why do you want to know?" Mike questioned.

"I don't," Lucas replied.

"Well then cover your ears I do," Dustin stated "Out with it Wheeler, who kissed who?"

"Does it matter?" Mike asked.

"Who kissed who?" Dustin demanded.

"Fine I kissed her okay?!" Mike exclaimed ignoring his own protests to keep the room quiet. He was relieved that Joyce had gone out to run errands "I kissed her, but it was stupid she probably doesn't understand what it means,"

"She doesn't understand or you're afraid she doesn't feel the same way?" Dustin questioned.

"Did she have a bad reaction?" Will asked.

"Well, no," Mike replied "She kind of smiled after but if she didn't know what a friend is then why would she know about any of this?"

"She doesn't have to know to feel the same way! And trust me she looks at you like the sun shines out of your ass or something," Dustin retorted.

"Even if she does feel the same way. If she doesn't understand what it means then I would be taking advantage of her if I tried to do anything about it." Mike argued "You guys with what she understands about the world she's basically a three year old. It wouldn't be right to force this on her now."

"But mentally she's our age and that means she has all the same gross lovey instincts you do. You wouldn't be forcing her into anything if you talked to her and she winds up wanting the same things you do." Dustin countered.

"I can't talk to her about this, I just can't" Mike sighed.

"Why the hell not?" Dustin inquired.

"Because I choke up every time I do!" Mike snapped, he was so done with this conversation.

"I call bullshit what's the real reason?" Dustin pressed.

"I know what you're doing," Mike glared. It wouldn't have been the first time Dustin did something like this. Seemingly pestering him for personal information for his own enjoyment when really he was just trying to solve his friends problem.

"I'm waiting," Dustin sighed.

"Because it would hurt too much if she rejected me are we done now?!" Mike exclaimed.

"Oh my god you act like you're in love with her or something. Just let it go your hormones will calm their shit and you'll get over it," Lucas interjected.

Everyone went quiet. Eleven started to stir all the bickering finally waking her. She moaned softly she'd hoped she'd feel better when she woke up, no such luck. She sat up and she could feel the tension in the room. More than anything she felt Mike, he was in pain not physical but emotional.

"Mike?" she questioned reaching out for him.

He patted her hand gently then got up not looking at her.

"I need some air," he muttered as he walked for front door.

"What the hell Lucas?!" Dustin exclaimed.

"That was totally uncalled for I think you really hurt him," Will added.

"You hurt Mike?" El asked a defensive tone to her small voice.

"He's over reacting and you know it! He's not really in love her he doesn't even know what love is! And he's right by the way, there's no way in hell she knows anything about love or kissing or sex or anything! She is mentally three and you're all mentally retarded if you believe this bullshit!" Lucas raged.

Suddenly a throw pillow collided with the side of his face. It was enough to shut him up but it wouldn't hurt him. The odd thing was no one threw the pillow not physically anyways.

Eleven wiped a small droplet of blood from beneath her nose and stared the boy down "Mouth breather," with that she stood and went to join Mike outside.

She was relieved to find him just outside on the front porch. She stepped out cringing when the cold snow met her sock covered feet.

"Don't bother Dustin," Mike said bitterly, he didn't bother looking back.

"Mike," she whispered.

He whipped around to see her "El go back inside, you're bare foot and have no coat you're going to make your cold worse,"

"But you're hurt," Eleven replied.

"I'm okay El really I just need some time to calm down. If I try to talk to him now I might hit him," Mike told her.

"I did," El whispered.

"You did what!?" Mike gasped.

"With a pillow," she shrugged.

Mike smirked but it soon turned into a laugh. She wasn't sure what

was so funny but something she said had made Mike happy that's all she cared about. She liked it when he laughed, when he smiled. Mike stepped over to her and gave her a quick embrace. She was a little disappointed. She liked it when their hugs lasted longer, when she could rest her head on his shoulder and close her eyes. That was the best feeling in the world to her. She never felt safer than when she was in his arms. But this time in her opinion he pulled away way too soon.

"Come on, let's get you back inside," Mike smiled; he was almost shocked by how fast she could turn his mood around. He was still pissed at Lucas but just seeing her made his heart melt.

When they entered the living room again all three boys were standing in the middle of the room in a triangle formation.

Will walked over to them turning his attention to Eleven "My mom has some more clothes for you in her room. You should change you've been wearing those all night. Come on I'll show you,"

Will whisked her off without much of a say in the matter leaving Mike, Dustin and Lucas alone. Mike had a feeling this was a plan they'd devised to get El out of the room so they could talk more. He still didn't like the idea of Will going off alone with El when the goal was to get her changed. No, he needed to stop thinking like that.

"Turn around," Dustin sighed.

"This is stupid," Lucas grumbled.

"You drew first blood!" Dustin said between clenched teeth.

"And then his girlfriend made it physical," Lucas retorted.

"Aw poor muffin, she hit you with a god damn pillow. Shake his hand!" Dustin demanded.

"Lucas if you don't want to shake my hand then fine. But we're going to talk about this." Mike sighed "I get it you're getting all pissy because you don't like how much time I'm spending with Eleven. But that's not going to change anything. I'm always going to make time for you guys and I'll always be friends with you no matter what. It's

just that right now El needs the attention and yeah I do have feelings for her. I trusted you with that and asked you for help and you saying something like that really sucks. Friends don't act like this and I really hope this stops because choosing between you and El isn't an option."

The other boy finally turned to face his friend "you say that now but you're going to fix things with her and then you're going to get all kissy and gross and everything is going to change. You're going to be off on a date with your girlfriend and we're still going to be those nerds in the basement playing D&D."

"Is that really what you think?" Mike scoffed, it was almost laughable "Me having a girlfriend isn't going to change anything about me. It just means I might need to split my time in half, or El could just hang out with us."

"I'm sorry for what I said," Lucas replied feeling embarrassed and guilty. Though he wasn't quite sure his friend wouldn't still get whisked away by the girl he seemed so obsessed with.

Mike was determined that his friend's fears wouldn't come true. His friends were just as important to him as Eleven, she just needed him more at the moment.

4. Chapter 4

Chapter four

It's special

"Don't go," she pleaded with him sadly.

"El I don't want to but I have to. Trust me I'd much rather be with you but school is kind of mandatory," Mike explained.

"I want to come with you," Eleven insisted.

"You're not ready for that yet El. It would just really stress you out if you tried." Mike replied.

She just frowned and sighed looking away from him.

"Hey I'll be back before you know it," he reassured her.

"How long?" she asked.

He paused, he didn't want to say six hours because that did seem like a long time "3:15 remember, that's when I'll be back."

She remembered, 3:15. Mike had been gone a long time that day she knew this day would be no different. She glanced back at the digital clock on the VCR to see what time it was currently, 8:05.

Mike sighed, he really didn't want to upset her but he didn't have a choice. His mom was already a little annoyed with him for spending the entire weekend and a school night at Will's. Suddenly he saw the time on the VCR flash and change to, of course, 3:15. He couldn't help it he just burst out laughing. She was so cute.

"I wish it worked that way," he leaned forward and embraced her. He sighed once more his smile disappearing "El, I don't want you to use your powers unless you have to. I don't like what it does to you."

"Okay," Eleven whispered in response. She didn't like it either, it made her head hurt and sometimes made her dizzy or tired. But

sometimes she just did automatically. She didn't want to upset Mike, she would work on it.

"Mike we're going to be late!" Will called from the door.

"I'll be back as soon as I can, I promise," Mike vowed pulling away.

"Okay," she whispered, she still didn't want him to go. Nothing anyone said could make her feel better about him leaving.

"Ready?" Will asked as they met at the front door.

"Does it matter?" Mike replied.

Will just laughed and the two set off on their bikes.

Will was still wary about riding on Mirkwood, he felt a presence there. Maybe it was just in his mind but he still peddled faster down that road than he usually did. Mike noticed the increase in speed and he couldn't blame him, that old road gave him the creeps too.

Back at the Byers house Eleven sat at the kitchen table picking at her plate but not eating. She was lost in thought, too many thoughts.

"El honey please eat, you're going to make yourself sick," Joyce tried to reason with her.

She didn't want to be sick, she was still getting over her cold. But she wasn't hungry either. Joyce seemed worried about her, she didn't like it when she caused people to worry. She took a few bites but her mind was still elsewhere.

Joyce noticed the girl's lost gaze and blank expression "Is there something wrong?"

El looked up at the woman sitting across the table from her and sighed sadly.

"That's a yes," Joyce commented trying to encourage the girl to talk to her "You can talk to me."

"Why can't I go to school too?" Eleven asked.

Joyce sighed; the poor girl just wanted to be normal.

"I'm not smart enough," El sighed feeling sick of herself. She felt her eyes stinging, she absolutely could not cry again. She knew it would happen anyways.

"Oh no, no, no, no Sweetie that's not it. That's not it all!" Joyce replied. She reached across the table and grabbed Eleven's hands "You are a very smart girl, I know it, I've seen it. Honey you're just learning, everything is new to you and it's not your fault you don't know everything the boys do. You're catching on so quick and you're making progress every day. You will go to school someday; you just have to learn how to live first."

Eleven nodded still fighting tears back. She didn't feel smart at all in fact she felt quite stupid. She wasn't sure she'd ever catch up with her friends. Mike told her about how school worked. What you do there, how he thought it was awful, but what concerned her was the aspect that people moved on from school. She was afraid that Mike and the others would be done with school long before she even started.

"Oh Honey, you'll get it eventually. Trust me," Joyce tried to reassure her.

She still didn't feel any better. She decided to drop the subject.

"El I want to talk to you about something and if it's too painful for you then we can stop okay," Joyce told her.

Eleven nodded.

"You understand what happened to your mom right?" Joyce asked.

"She died," Eleven swallowed. The words tasted bitter.

"I'm so sorry about what happened and I wish it could've been different. But either way you need somewhere to stay. I was wondering how you would feel about staying here with Will, Jonathan and I," Joyce questioned.

She remembered what Mike said though she was sure that Mrs. Wheeler would want her living with them. She couldn't blame her,

she was dangerous.

"You would be like my new mom?" Eleven asked.

"Well no one can ever replace your mom, but yes I'd treat you like my daughter." Joyce replied.

"And Will and Jonathan would be like my brothers?" El questioned.

"Right," Joyce nodded "And I know Jonathan seems a little intimidating but he'll come around. He just likes to keep to himself. I didn't tell you this but before Will was born he wanted a baby sister."

El smiled slightly "Mike said he wanted me to live with him."

"That was really nice of him, but I don't know how his mom would feel about that. She sort of has her hands full." Joyce replied "But would you be happy staying here? You could still see Mike as much as you want."

Eleven nodded.

"Good. You can have my room and I'll get you a new bed. How about this afternoon I take you out and you can pick out some nice clothes?" Joyce promised her.

"But these are nice," El replied looking at the jeans and blue floral shirt she was wearing.

"Well yeah they are, but you're going to need more clothes and I want you pick out something you like." Joyce explained.

Eleven nodded and her mind quickly changed courses "Can I ask you a question?"

"Of course you can," Joyce smiled.

"Mike doesn't want to be my friend but he isn't mean to me, he doesn't want to be my brother either. I don't understand what he means. Why doesn't he just tell me?" Eleven questioned.

Joyce just grinned "Oh sweetie, how do I explain this. I think Mike

has special feelings for you, romantic feelings."

"I don't understand," El whispered. She wished she did, the fact that she didn't made her feel worse about herself.

"When you have romantic feelings for someone... it's different than the feelings you have for anyone else. You want to spend a lot of time with them and you might feel sad when they leave. You like being close to them or touching them. They make you feel happy and when you're with them you get this warm dizzy feeling" Joyce explained a bit awkward.

Eleven nodded it sounded familiar, she felt that way when she was with Mike. Then she remembered something "You touch them? With your lips sometimes?"

Joyce almost did a double take "You mean kiss? Oh sweetie did he kiss you? Put his lips on yours?"

Kiss, that's what it was called. She nodded.

"How do you feel about that?" Joyce asked.

"Good," Eleven answered feeling heat come to her face but she didn't know why "Mike feels this way too?"

"It looks like it," Joyce replied.

"Why didn't he tell me?" El questioned.

"He's probably just scared, or embarrassed." Joyce answered.

"Why?" Eleven questioned.

"Maybe he's afraid you don't feel the same way," Joyce replied "maybe you should talk to him about it. I just want you to know that you don't have to do anything you don't want to do alright. If it doesn't feel right to you then you have every right to say no."

As an experienced mother and a new parental figure to Eleven she wasn't sure how she felt about this. They were very young and she had no doubt in the potential of young love. She just wasn't sure if El

was ready for this sort of thing. She highly doubted Mike would ever hurt her. Yet again she said the same thing about herself and Lonnie years ago. If anything happened to go wrong she wanted to prepare her but she didn't need to tell her about sex quite yet.

Eleven just nodded slightly confused at what she meant. But she was no longer confused about what was happening with Mike and that was all she cared about in the moment.

...

"Damn Mike you look like hell," Dustin commented as he sat down at the cafeteria table.

"I barley slept last night, what's your excuse?" Mike retorted.

"Ouch," Dustin replied.

"He's slept on the couch with El the past few nights, she has like restless sleep syndrome or something," Will added.

"Sleeping on the couch with El huh?" Dustin teased.

"Oh stop," Mike groaned.

"Make me," Dustin replied.

"Excuse me," a small voice piped in.

All four boys turned shocked to see Jenifer Hayes -aka the prettiest girl in school- standing there.

"Um hi," the blond girl said shyly.

"Hi," Dustin replied almost dazed.

"Uh Will I just- Uh- I just wanted to say I'm glad you're okay," she stuttered.

Will was taken aback that she was actually talking to him. This was the first time someone in school had come up to him not to make fun of him.

"Um thanks," Will replied feeling heat rush to his cheeks.

She looked like she was about to walk away but then she spoke again. "I was wondering, maybe, if you wanted to go to the school dance together."

Will almost fell off his chair at this he just stared at the girl with a blank expression before Mike nudged his leg.

"Uh yeah, yeah sure of course," Will blurted out.

"Okay, so um you'll pick me up around 6:00" Jenifer replied oddly enough seeming nervous.

"Yeah," Will replied breathless.

"See you then," she smiled.

As the blond girl walked away Will felt faint and the rest stared on in confusion and awe.

"What in the hell just happened!?" Lucas questioned almost in shock.

"I should've faked my death years ago!" Will exclaimed.

They all broke out laughing.

"Oh, oh dude, I just realized how did Will and Mike end being the first out of us to get girl friends?" Dustin asked.

"Oh because you're so attractive?" Mike replied.

"Bite me, freckles," Dustin retorted "So are you taking El to the Snowball?"

"I don't want to talk about it," he stated trying to hide the conflicted feelings behind the subject. He wasn't doing a good job.

"This has really got you down huh?" Will said in sympathy.

"Dude you should just talk to her. I mean come on it's easy to talk to El, you do all the talking," Dustin laughed.

"I think I'm going to go start on that history paper. I'll see you in English," Mike said quickly changing the subject.

No one tried to stop him as he walked away. The three just sat there watching him leave.

"That poor love sick idiot," Dustin sighed.

"I don't think there's anything we can do for him, he has to figure this out on his own. He's not going to listen to a word we say." Lucas stated.

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Eleven waited impatiently staring at the clock wishing that she could speed up time. She just wanted to see Mike she wanted to talk to him about how he felt how she felt. She was excited, giddy even a little nervous. She had a strange feeling in the pit of her stomach. She fidgeted with the edge of her dress rubbing the silky material between her fingers. She looked back to the clock, 3:00. Fifteen more minutes, it still wouldn't be soon enough.

She has spent the day with Joyce trying to soak up as much information as she could. She helped put away dishes and fold laundry to keep herself busy. Joyce took her out to get some new clothes as promised. She didn't mind the experience but she didn't like the busy atmosphere of the store. She liked the calm and quietness of the house. Joyce was now vacuuming the other rooms. El didn't like the noise so she waited on the couch.

What seemed like an eternity later the front door opened and Will and Mike walked in. Eleven practically ran to meet them.

"Hey El," Will greeted.

She just waved, as mean as it sounded she really wasn't all that excited about seeing him.

Mike couldn't help but smile when he saw her. Despite his conflicting feelings about their relationship she always made him happy when they were together "Hi El, how was your day?"

"Good," she replied quietly.

"That's good, so you're happy here?" Mike asked. He knew that she wouldn't really be staying with him, he wanted to make sure was happy where she was.

She nodded.

They started to walk to the living room and Mike looked her over.

"Is that a new dress?" he asked creating small talk.

She nodded "Pretty?"

"Very," he replied, he wasn't talking about the dress.

Her heart was racing for some unknown reason. She felt a little like she was going to throw up. She must have still been sick. She ignored the feeling; there was something she wanted to do. Will continued on into the living room but El stopped in the hallway tugging gently on Mike's sleeve.

He stopped and turned to her a little worried by her expression. She looked scared.

"Is everything okay?" he asked.

She looked down at her feet then back up to his eyes. There was nothing to be afraid of so why did she feel like there was? She pushed the feeling back again and a little too hastily cupped one hand over his cheek and pressed her lips against his. Mike was so shocked by her actions that he pushed her back. He stood at a distance he felt like he had been hit by lightning. Electricity was running all through his veins. She felt the same but she also felt something dark, a rejection that made her want to cry.

"El- what- why- why did you do that?" Mike asked still stunned.

"I-" she whispered.

"You- you can't just do that," Mike told her sternly.

She looked down trying so hard not to let tears sneak through. But then she suddenly got angry. She didn't know where it came from but now she felt like yelling. She stared him straight in the eye "but you did it first,"

Mike almost fell back against the wall. He didn't mean to react the way he did he was just shocked. He felt so many emotions and now guilt was added on. He couldn't stand to see the tears that pooled in her eyes.

"El I'm sorry, I didn't mean to raise my voice at you. I just- I know I did it first but- you don't understand okay. You can't just do that alright, it's special." He sighed.

"Why is it okay for you to kiss me but I can't," she asked a little bitter.

Mike stared at her in awe "How do you know what kissing is?"

"You" she shook her head.

"I know but how do you know the word?" Mike pressed.

"Joyce," she replied, why did it matter? "You didn't answer my question."

Mike sighed again "You don't understand what it means El,"

"Yes I do," she protested.

"No you don't," Mike repeated "You don't get it. I know you think you do but it's more complicated than that."

"So you don't have romantic feelings for me?" she questioned she was starting to cry "So why did you kiss me?"

Mike felt almost faint "What?"

Why was he doing this and why was it so painful to her? It almost felt like he was trying to make her feel like this like he was toying with her. No, no way, not him not Mike. He loved her she knew it she'd felt it. Maybe no one really loved her maybe it was all in her head. She collapsed to floor pulling her knees to her chest. Mike

rushed to her side unsure what to do next. He knew he had caused this, he should've just excepted the kiss. Maybe she did know, maybe she did understand. He felt bad for belittling her.

"El I'm sorry, El please look at me," he pleaded with her stroking her arm.

"Stop, please stop," she whimpered.

Mike dropped his hand feeling tears in his own eyes "El I'm sorry, I was just scared. I thought you didn't know I thought you didn't understand what it means. But you do don't you? I'm sorry I should think more of you. I know how smart you are, I should've known you would figure it out."

She wouldn't look at him. He'd seen her get like this before and there was usually nothing he could do to help her. He couldn't stand it just watching her cry helplessly. Only this time he had to do something, this time it was all his fault. He had an idea but he wasn't sure it would help. Mike gently caressed her shoulder and leaned forward to kiss her cheek softly.

Eleven gasped quietly at the soft warm sensation. She looked over at him with wet eyes and he stared back. She felt him again, he was sad again but this sad was different. It was like he was sad for her, guilt.

"El I do," he sighed "have feelings for you. I was just afraid that you didn't understand or- or wouldn't feel the same way."

"But I do," she replied weakly.

"I know, I know now," Mike nodded.

He reached forward and swiped some tears from her cheek. The warm feeling that Joyce described, it fit perfectly with this feeling. She tilted her head into his hand and sighed.

"I'm so sorry I made you cry. It'll never happen again I promise." He whispered to her.

They stayed like that for a few minutes. They thought that it is their private moment. A personal memory they would share with only

each other. Little did they know the Byers' house had thin walls and everyone heard the whole thing. Delusion is a funny thing and love is full it. They were just fine with that.

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i know this one was a little short but I feel this was a nice place to end the chapter and besides Mike and El finally kissing makes up for it doesn't it?

5. Chapter 5

Stranger thing the 2nd chapter

Chapter 5 : Sleeper together is bad

The weather was well below freezing wind and thick snow whipped around violently. Yet he was warm. In that moment only around the two of them amongst the sheet of ice and snow emanated a strong warmth. The intense feeling of her mitten covered hands in his hair, her body leaning gently against his, the subtle curve of her back where he held her, her rosy cheek under his palm and her lips... her lips were softer than silk and tasted sweeter than honey. It only lasted a few seconds but the love that blossomed from the kiss should've melted the snow around them. It didn't, the unsightly weather continued around them.

Mike just stared at her his breath coming out in small cloud like puffs, almost laboured. Eleven on the other hand seemed completely content. For him the feeling was euphoric. It made his heart race a mile a minute gave him a shock like electricity followed by an overwhelming wave of adoration for her. For her the feeling of their love made her feel calm almost dazed in fuzzy haze of serenity. The different ways they felt had the same effect. It was like a drug highly addictive demanding more and leaving a feeling of with drawl with in absence.

"Are you cold?" Mike questioned.

Her cheeks and nose were bright pink and she trembled slightly. He thought she looked beautiful like this but yet again that opinion never faded in his eyes. Eleven nodded sheepishly she didn't want to ruin the moment but the cold was really starting to get to her.

Mike took her hand with a smile and led her inside. As the door shut behind them Karen rounded the corner. Mike dropped El's hand immediately. If his mother saw them acting like a couple they would never get time alone together. He hoped Eleven understood.

"Oh, hello El I didn't know you'd be coming over tonight." Karen

stated "Michael we talked about this if you're going to bring friends over you have to ask first."

Mike frowned "But I did, you knew my friends were staying over tonight."

"Yes but-" Karen sighed not wanted to say that the fact this particular friend was a girl made it different. "I didn't expect to have so many people over."

"It's just one extra person. She can stay right? It's really cold out there and I want to help her with her homework." Mike questioned.

It wasn't a total lie but it wasn't the full truth either. He really wanted to spend time with her because he was addicted to her presence.

"Alright," Karen sighed "as long as Joyce knows where she is."

"Of course she does," Mike replied removing his coat and reaching to take El's "Come on El, do you want to go to my room or the basement?"

"The basement please," Karen piped in. She didn't know the logic behind it. She just felt better with the two of them being in the basement verses being alone in his room where his bed was. Though as she learned with Nancy that if teenagers wanted to have sex they were going to do it regardless. She wanted to believe that Mike wouldn't be doing that kind of thing any time soon but she wasn't so sure.

Mike raised an eye brow wondering her reasoning behind her request but dropped the subject discussing it wouldn't go anywhere good. "Okay, let's go El,"

Eleven followed Mike passed his mother looking meekly at the floor. Mrs. Wheeler intimidated her a little bit yet again so did a lot of people.

When they reached the bottom of the stairs Mike felt the familiar feeling of El's hand on his shoulder. One look told him there was something on her mind. One month, it had been one month exactly since the night he'd found her in the woods. In one month his entire

life had changed. In one month he had gotten to know her almost better than he knew himself. All her soft touches, every expression on her angelic face, every little whisper and nod. It was all meaningless to others but Mike had learned how to decode her like no one else could.

"El, what's wrong?" he questioned.

"You don't want your mom to know about us, why?" she asked.

"I told you, that sort of thing, kissing and holding hands and what not, it's privet." Mike replied.

"But you hold my hand around other people all the time. Why not your mom? Are we doing something bad?" El questioned.

"Well no, it's not bad. It's just..." Mike sighed "It's hard to explain,"

"I wouldn't understand," she corrected, it was things like this that fueled a monster inside of her. A self-hatred that ate at her soul and delayed the progress she was making.

"No El, don't think of it like that. You would get it if I could just explain it right, but I don't know how." Mike reassured her.

He felt a little like he was lying to her, which he hated but he felt it was necessary. He knew exactly how to explain it. But he knew if he did she would ask too many questions and he would end up being faced with the whole 'birds and the bees' concept.

"Try," Eleven pressed.

Mike sighed again thinking of a way to explain this without getting into anything dirty. "Well I don't know, adults just think we're too young to be more than friends. If my mom or Ms. Byers found out about us they'd get all weird and maybe try to stop us from getting too close to each other."

"But why?" she continued to question him. This was going exactly where he feared it would.

Mike stalled for a few seconds "Um, I guess it's because they're afraid

we'll do something inappropriate."

"Inappropriate like what?" El sighed. He was stepping in circles avoiding something she could tell but she had no clue what.

Mike had gotten himself stuck in-between a rock and a hard place. Eleven was the same age he was there was no reason for her not to know about sex, every kid their age did. Hell some kids their age were even doing it. He just didn't feel that he was the right person to hear all the nitty gritty secrets from. But yet again she had surprised him before, maybe she already knew but just wasn't making the connection. Maybe Joyce had already taken care of the subject. He decided to test the waters.

"Like sleep together," he said chewing at the inside of his cheek.

She made a strange face "What's so wrong about sleeping together, what bad things could happen if you're asleep?"

He almost laughed, her response was so cute and innocent. He didn't want to spoil her purity. That childlike obliviousness that made her, well, El.

"El maybe we should talk about this another time," Mike replied.

She sighed pouting slightly. Mike couldn't help but smile at her. He took her hand caressing her skin gently.

"Do you want to read?" he asked attempting to distract her.

This made her smile, those adorable dimples popping up. He loved it when he could make her smile like this, when it met her eyes.

They nestled down in her little fort that was still standing. It wasn't the most comfortable place to sit but she liked it in there. She couldn't explain why.

She snuggled up to him making herself comfortable as Mike pulled the book from underneath the pillow were they last left it. About a week ago he had started to read *The Hobbit* to her. It had become their favorite way to pass time together.

Eleven could read at about a second grade level which made any book of interest difficult for her to enjoy. Joyce had her reading books that were at her level but she found every single one incredibly boring. This novel was much more in her interest.

Mike enjoyed reading to her. The way her eyes silently followed the words as he spoke them, how intrigued she got in the story line. Of course he didn't mind reading his favorite novel series again. Maybe this would give her something to talk to the others about.

She probably would've sat there and listened to him read the entire novel from front to back if they were given the time. Mike observed her behaviours she obviously had a few learning difficulties. An attention deficit disorder of some sort seemed to be one of them. She suffered quite a few ADHD like symptoms. He didn't blame her for being so easily distracted. The lab must have been fairly quiet, not many people around. Out in the real world it was so loud and busy. Of course she was distracted she wasn't used to this sort of activity. The fact that she was so still and focused while he read to her made him smile; it showed progress on her part. One day she would overcome her challenges and live a normal, healthy, happy life. He would make sure this was her future.

After about an hour of reading Mike knew they should be getting to work on her home work. In fact he should've been working on his homework. They were supposed to get it done before the others showed up. Eleven wasn't actually in school but Joyce was home schooling her until she caught up. She was making huge strides everyone was seeing exactly what Mike had seen from the beginning. Despite everything she'd missed she was still an extremely bright girl.

Just as the story hit a height of suspense Mike decided to cut it off.

"No," El protested reaching for the novel.

Mike smiled pulling the book further away "It's getting late and we both have homework."

"Just a little longer," El pleaded. She reached over him placing a knee between his to reach the book.

Just weeks ago this position would've mortified him. Not now, there was no such thing as personal space when it came to her. He had no clue where the idea came from but before she could grab the book he reached down and teased her side gently. She gasped and jolted backwards.

"You're ticklish?" Mike laughed.

"What?" she questioned.

He grinned a little mischievously "Like this," he suddenly grabbed her tickling her sides.

Eleven squealed and giggled trying to squirm free. He paid close attention making sure she wasn't in distress but she seemed to understand this was meant to be playful. In her attempts to wriggle from his grasp she knocked one of the chairs causing the blanket roofing the fort to fall over them. All sound ceased for a moment. Eleven lied on the floor panting to get her breath back. Then she started laughing. I light soft giggle iridescent like wind chimes. Mike pushed the blanket off of them staring at her in awe. He realized he'd never heard her laugh before. It was just the most beautiful sound.

When she saw his face her happiness faded "What's wrong?"

"Nothing," Mike smiled "I've just never heard you laugh before."

She looked away sheepishly.

"It's not bad," he quickly reassured her "I like it, you should do it more often."

"Just never do that again," she replied.

"What tickle you?" he laughed.

"I don't care what it's called," she said almost humorously.

"Holy shit, call me delusional but I swear a just heard El speak more than one syllable." Dustin joked as he barged in on their little moment. Eleven had started speaking a lot more but it was mostly to Mike or Joyce. She still remained fairly quiet around the others.

"Do I even want to know what you two were doing down here?" Lucas commented upon seeing their current stances.

Mike sat up straight. It did look wrong; he was almost lying over her.

"Does everything have to be dirty with you two?" Mike asked.

"I wouldn't if you two would just keep it G rated," Dustin retorted.

"We weren't doing anything," Mike rolled his eyes "Where's Will?"

"He didn't want to come, said something about feeling sick." Lucas replied.

"El must've given him her cold," Dustin stated.

"I did?" Eleven gasped.

"It's okay El it's not your fault. It's just what happens when you get sick. It spreads to other people. There's really no way to stop it." Mike smiled.

She felt bad she didn't want Will to be sick because of her. She didn't want him to be sick at all. He'd had a bad cough for a week or two now and he threw up the night before while they were outside.

"I just don't believe that you're not sick Mike, You know with all the mouth to mouth you've been practicing lately. You want to be a life guard or something?" Dustin teased.

"You're running out of kissing jokes aren't you?" Mike stated.

"Yes but give it a few days, genius takes time you know," Dustin retorted.

"Genius, now that's hilarious," Mike laughed.

"What does genius mean?" El asked in a whisper.

"It means the opposite of what you are," Lucas commented.

Mike shot him an angry glare "Don't say things like that to her!"

"And you've released the beast." Dustin muttered.

"Holly shit, it was a joke. Don't bite my head off," Lucas exclaimed.

"Well I don't think it's funny," Mike replied bitterly. People calling Eleven stupid in any context was something he would not stand for.

"It's okay, don't be mad at him." Eleven whispered tugging at Mike's sleeve gently.

Mike sighed, he supposed he was getting upset over nothing. He joked around with them like that all the time, none of the insults were meant. But Eleven already thought so little of herself. He just wanted to reassure her that she was smart and beautiful and fully deserving a happy life.

"I guess I am a little too over protective of you," Mike admitted.

"A little?!" Dustin and Lucas exclaimed in unison.

"Oh shut up," Mike rolled his eyes. "And where are your girlfriends?"

"So you're finally admitting that she's your girlfriend?" Dustin asked.

"Because it wasn't obvious?" Mike returned.

"Damn now it's not as much fun to tease you about it" Dustin frowned.

"No but this is," Mike smirked. The idea suddenly accrued to him that they're teasing wouldn't be funny anymore if he turned it around on them. He linked a finger under El's chin and kissed her cheek softly a few times.

"Oh man, gross, cut it out I'm going to throw up," Lucas exclaimed.

"It's going to be along night," Dustin commented.

Mike grinned at their distaste.

"Boys.... And El, Dinner is ready!" Karen called down the stairs.

"Thank god, that means you two have to stop," Lucas commented.

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The dinner table was unusually crowded. They were just barely able to squeeze a chair in for El. Everyone just seemed to automatically leave two spaces for Mike and Eleven to sit beside each other.

Eleven kept her eyes on her plate or on her hands fidgeting in her lap. Her comfort zone included Mike, Joyce and the boys that was it. With anyone else she became very shy and silent.

"So what did they have you doing in there, Spying on the Russians or something?" Mr. Wheeler asked breaking the silence that seemed to consume the dining room.

"Dad!" Mike hissed.

Eleven had talked to Mike about what they did to her in there. The water chamber, the dark room, all the tests, the drugs, mind games, hallucinations, hitting her, starving her as a punishment, calling her worthless, making her hurt or kill others. Needless to say after discussing it she was having an emotional break down. But it helped her to tell someone about all the awful things she'd been through. She didn't need to go through it again especially not with a small audience.

"Bad things, really bad," Eleven whispered.

"El it's okay you don't have to talk about it." Mike reassured her "Dad you can't just ask her that."

Mike's voice seemed to fade out and suddenly she was reliving one of those awful moments. Sometimes her mind would send her back to these places and she didn't know how to stop it.

"Come on now, it's simple and we know you can do it. You fire that gun and you'll get a nice surprise when you get back to your room. If you don't you get the bucket. Easy right?" Dr. Pearce bargained.

Pearce was Brenner's right hand man and just as maniacal. Though Pearce usually took the dirtier jobs. Ones that involved physically torturing her. Eleven knew that Brenner was always not far away watching the events take place.

She sat in her chair hugging her knees. She stared at the firearm fastened to a metal stand and the man shaped target just beyond it. They wanted her to shoot it without touching it. Although there wasn't a real person on the other end she knew that they were training her for a future much more lively target. She didn't want that, she couldn't do that, but she didn't want the alternative either.

She gulped down the anxiety raising in her throat and shook her head at him.

"Come on now, what harm could come from this? It's easy just concentrate and fire." Pearce insisted.

She shook her head again.

"I'm not playing your stupid games today, fire the gun," Pearce snapped.

"No," Eleven protested. That was worst possible thing she could've done. She knew all too well Pearce was quick to lose his temper but she said it anyways. Now she would be punished for it.

She saw that murderous look in his eyes and sunk back into the cold metal chair. Pearce stepped towards her hand out stretched. She whimpered tears coming to her eyes. He yanked her up painfully by her arms and tried to force her to walk.

"No, no please! No!" she screamed and tried to break free.

He held on her with a painfully tight grip forcing her forward.

"No! no! papa!" she knew he wouldn't help her but she was desperate.

Pearce kicked the back of knees forcing her to kneel. She knew tried to take a deep breath knowing fully well what she was about to experience. She couldn't force her body to calm enough to inhale. Pearce throttled the back of her neck and plunged her face downward in to a bucket of water. Her screams ceased all that could be heard was splashing sound of her trying to break free. She wanted to scream even more, scream for the air she was running out of. She knew better than that. Her lungs started to burn but she forced to herself to hold on. She didn't know why, wouldn't have been easier to

let herself die? Just when she couldn't hold on any longer Pearce pulled her back. She fell on the floor gasping for air and sobbing inconsolably.

She had been in a trance for nearly a minute seemingly having an anxiety attack. Tears ran down her pale cheeks and her breath was laboured.

"El, El look at me. El it's okay, El," Mike tried to coax her out of her reverie.

"Is she okay?" Dustin questioned.

Mike bit his lip, he wasn't sure. He'd noticed her space out before but never like this.

"El you're scaring me," Mike placed his hand on her cheek no longer caring what his parents thought.

The second his palm touched her face she snapped out of it gasping in shock.

"It's okay, it's okay, you're safe I'm right here," Mike hushed massaging her palms gently.

Everyone watched the two, the atmosphere was tense. Ted and Karen were surprised they'd never seen their son express this kind of emotion towards anyone.

"Come on, let's go to the other room." Mike suggested. He wanted to get her out of the room away from all the prying eyes. He knew if he were in this situation he wouldn't want to be sitting there having a meltdown in front of everyone. "It's okay, come here, come on,"

He took her hand and led her back to the basement no one dared to stop them. He noticed that her steps were a little wobbly and her breathing still wasn't even. When they reached the bottom of the stairs he turned to her and pulled her into his arms. That's when the dam broke she started to sob into his shoulder.

"El you're shaking," Mike sighed feeling her tremble uncontrollably. "It's okay; you're safe here I promise, no one is going to hurt you."

After a minute of Mike holding her and his hands gently stroking her back Eleven started to calm. Though she was far from ready to go back upstairs.

"El, what happens when you space out like that? What do you see?" Mike asked quietly.

"Bad place," she whispered.

Eleven often spoke in full sentences to him but in times like this she'd revert back to her old ways.

"The lab? Is it like a nightmare, but you're awake?" he questioned.

She nodded.

"What happened, what did they do?" he was always hesitant to ask her these types of questions in fear it would make her shut down even more. It also made him very angry. He tried to not to show it but every time she told him about the awful things they did to her all he wanted to do was make them suffer in worse way than she had.

"The water," she squeaked barely audible.

"The sensory deprivation tank, the bath?" he asked.

Eleven shook her head "under water.. can't breathe."

"They put you under water so you couldn't breathe? They held you down? Tried to drown you?" his eyes stung at the words. No it was just too awful.

She nodded again.

Mike bit his lip trying to prevent himself from saying something. He held her tighter he felt pain for her, felt angry that those bastards weren't rotting in a cell for what they'd done. When they'd met the "bad men" at the school he hadn't known the half of what they did to her. If he had he had a feeling he would've done something he'd regret later. He needed to forget about them and focus on her. She needed him to be there for her not focusing on what should've happened to Brenner and his lackeys.

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"Is Will going to strike out with Jenifer?" Dustin laughed shaking the magic 8 ball "Ha! It is decidedly so, I knew it."

"If you spend your entire life listening to that thing I'm afraid for your future," Mike commented.

"Why is he talking to that?" El whispered.

"Because he has mental issues," Mike replied.

"Do I have mental issues?" Dustin repeated to the toy "See it says no."

"It's a magic 8 ball, you ask it a question shake it and tells you the answer." Lucas explained.

"Not really, it's just a toy it gives a random answer every time." Mike corrected.

"So have you talked to you know who about the dance next Friday?" Dustin questioned.

"Why don't you ask the ball?" Mike laughed.

"Should I shove this up his ass?" Dustin questioned shaking the toy again "Ask again later, damn."

"Really don't talk about her like she's not here, she's not stupid." Mike stated returning to the previous question.

"Fine then, El has Mike asked you to go the Snow ball yet or he being a little chicken shit like always?" Dustin asked.

"He asked me a long time ago," Eleven replied.

"Is there anything else we should know?" Dustin questioned Mike.

"No, I don't have to give you updates on my love life what are you my shrink?" Mike replied.

"What love life?" Lucas laughed.

"I'm doing a hell of a lot better in that department than either of you," Mike stated.

Lucas quickly flipped him off. Elven made a strange face at the gesture.

"Never do that, it's bad," Mike told her.

"Oh come on, El giving someone the finger, that would be hilarious," Dustin laughed.

Mike couldn't imagine her being anything but sweet and innocent, he didn't want to.

"Oh right she's your little angel, the angel that squeezed people's brains all over the school hallway! Devil horns hold up her halo real nice." Lucas exclaimed.

"I didn't want to," Eleven whispered sadly. She didn't want to but they were going to hurt Mike and the others and she panicked. She shouldn't have done what she did.

"Hey, we know, we know you didn't want to hurt anyone. But you didn't have a choice, you did the right thing." Mike reassured her.

But she had killed someone, not just someone multiple people. That wasn't right killing people wasn't ever the right thing no matter what. He was so quick to forgive all the awful things she'd done, she didn't deserve his forgiveness.

"It's okay El, those bastards are in hell where they belong." Dustin told her.

"Hell?" she questioned.

"Some people believe that there's a place where all the bad people go when they die, that's hell" Mike explained.

She didn't understand how someone could go somewhere after they died. She thought when you were dead that was it you were just gone, maybe not.

"Do they come back?" she asked.

Mike smiled, he loved her child like responses to some things "No El, weather you believe in an afterlife or not dead is dead. They're never coming back."

"Do you believe?" she questioned.

"I don't know, my parents do. There's supposed to be a place for all the good people too, Heaven, they believe in that." he replied, he'd never really pondered his faith. He didn't know if he bought all the god crap. All he knew is he hated it when his parents used to drag him to church every Sunday.

She nodded; if these worlds did exist she knew witch one she would go to. Despite how much forgiveness her friends gave she knew that if there was an afterlife she belonged in hell.

"Don't you think the upside-down qualifies as hell?" Dustin questioned.

"Maybe, does that make the Demogorgon the devil?" Lucas suggested.

"Unless there's something worse in there," Dustin replied.

"Don't even talk about that," Mike shivered.

As they conversed about the past events Mike felt El snuggle up against his shoulder. There was something wrong he could tell but he didn't have a chance to ask.

"Oh man not again! You guys are disgusting," Lucas gagged.

"What's wrong?" Mike asked her ignoring his friends.

She shook her head.

"No there's something wrong I can tell," he insisted, he knew her better than this.

Eleven just shook her head again nuzzling her face into his shoulder. He held her closer and stroked her back. He didn't like this, there was

something going on with her. He wasn't sure if he could help but if she didn't talk to him then he wouldn't be able to try.

"Will Mike and El ever stop being so gross?" Dustin questioned "Ask again later, well what help are you?"

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It was reaching midnight and of course the Wheeler's basement was still alight with activity. Karen rarely allowed sleepovers but when she did the rule was they could stay up as long as they wanted but they had to be quiet after Holly went to bed.

The four settled in to watch a movie as per usual on these nights. Mike was a little unsure of watching Alien with El but yet again she had witnessed worse horrors in real life. They learned quickly that she wasn't one for horror movies. She would hide her face in Mike's shoulder at the scary parts. He didn't mind he actually found it a little cute. As long as she wasn't getting too scared, but he knew she understood that movies were just make believe.

All three boys knew the movie by heart yet watching it again still proved entertaining. This time around Mike found himself paying more attention to the girl huddled up beside him than he did to the screen.

Tension mounted in film an eerie sound score started to play in the background. Eleven pressed herself closer to Mike sensing something was about to happen. Suddenly the creature jumped out ready for the kill. In flawless unity Lucas grabbed El by the shoulders mock roaring in her ear. She shrieked and grabbed on to Mike wrapping her arms around his neck so tight she nearly choked him. Unaware of what she'd done Lucas flew back a few feet landing not so softly on the sofa.

"Serves you right jackass!" Mike exclaimed. He stroked El's back and laid his head on hers.

She calmed almost instantly after the scare but remained slouched against Mike. He could tell she was getting tired.

"Maybe we should turn the movie off and go to bed," Mike suggested.

"Who the hell are you and what have you done with Mike?" Dustin gawked.

"Okay fine turn it down a little we're going to go lie down." Mike rolled his eyes.

"We're going to lie down, I think we should separate you two," Lucas commented.

"Shut up," Mike sighed.

As Mike made sure El was comfortable in her fort Lucas and Dustin continued to stare at the screen.

Lucas took a brief glance back at his friend "This won't change anything my ass, he doesn't even notice."

"It's the honey moon stage, it'll pass," Dustin whispered back.

"Don't hold your breath," Lucas replied.

Behind the boys the young couple settled in for the night. Mike rolled out his sleeping bag right at the entrance of the small fort. Eleven had horrendous nightmares nearly every time she fell asleep. He wanted to be close in case she woke up scared. By the time Mike got his sleeping arrangements situated Eleven was curled up amongst blankets and pillows looking very sleepy.

Mike smiled and pulled a thick quilt over her. He let his hand linger for a few seconds and her eyes fluttered shut "Good night El,"

There was no response, she wasn't quite asleep yet but she was definitely out of it. Mike stayed with her until her breathing evened out and her body rested limp against the blankets. Eventually Mike gave up on trying to sleep and rejoined the others. He still glanced back at her every few seconds.

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Later that night Eleven woke to darkness. she couldn't remember

what woke her but her heart was racing. She was hesitant to wake Mike for such a childish reason as she had nightmare but she really wanted to. She could remember Mike telling her that if she ever needed him no matter what time it was she could always call him or use Will's radio. She assumed that this applied to waking him up if they were in the same place.

She saw his sleeping form laying wrapped in a sleeping bag at the entrance of the fort. She inched forward and tapped Mike's shoulder gently whispering his name. He didn't respond. She said his name a little louder and rubbed her arm. It was strange he usually woke easily. Something wasn't right she could feel it. She crawled around so they were facing each other. He looked so peaceful she thought it might be best to just leave him but she couldn't shake the feeling, she had to wake him.

Eleven shook Mike's shoulder slightly and his head fell back revealing his slit throat and bloody clothing. He wasn't moving, wasn't breathing the blood was old, he was gone...

She screamed in horror and suddenly she found herself in reality waking up for the second time in the real world. She was lying on an incline and she realized that Mike had pulled her in to his lap. She grabbed on to his arm curling up against him fresh tears slipping past the flood gates.

Mike held her securely subconsciously rocking her gently "I wish these nightmares would just leave you alone."

She cried into his shirt gripping him tightly. The pain of losing him was crippling even if it was only for a few seconds in a fictional dreamscape.

"El please tell me what happened, I want to help you but I can't if you don't tell me what you're afraid of." Mike pleaded with her. She had been open with him about so much of her awful past and it may have been asking too much to request more. He only wanted to help her, calm her fears and make sure she knew she was safe.

She shook her head as her tears continued.

"El it's okay you can tell me, you can tell me anything," he reassured her "What happened in your dream? Who tried to hurt you?"

"You-" she choked unable to finish the sentence.

Mike's breath caught in his throat "Me, I tried to hurt you?"

She shook her head "They hurt you, the bad men. You- you died,"

He was shocked, she had been having nightmares about him getting hurt. He had no idea. Sure he had had his fair share of dreams involving her well-being but nothing that made him this hysterical. She was genuinely terrified for him, it made him feel a little guilty. But what was he supposed to tell her, he wasn't going to die? Tough it was unlikely they did live in Hawkins and nothing could be known for certain.

"El I'm okay look at me, you don't have to worry about me," he whispered to her.

"But I do," she sniffed.

"I know, I worry about you every day." He sighed "But we're safe. The bad men haven't bothered us since the night Will came back and the Demogorgon is gone. Okay we're both safe now. Let's just agree not to worry about each other too much until we have a reason."

She nodded but they both knew it was a hopeless agreement. Not worrying was not possible.

"Come on, let's go back to sleep," Mike whispered sliding her off his lap.

"I can't" El replied.

"I'll help you, just lie down," he told her with a small smile. He crawled inside the fort with her and settled in right next to her.

She stared up at him as they lied there together the emotion she saw in his eyes was undeniable. Mike began to gently run his fingers over her shoulder and up her neck knowing there was a calming pressure point in this area. Less than a minute later it was clear that his tactic

was working.

"No," El said suddenly forcing her heavy eyes open.

He stopped and looked at her in concern "What is it,"

"Sleeping together is bad," she replied.

He smiled at her and continued to sooth her "Not like this El, this is fine."

She wanted to ask questions but she was just too tired. Soon with his help she faded off to sleep once again and this time there was no nightmares.

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sorry it's been a while but I've included a lot of goodies in this chapter and unfortunately fanfiction is not my main priority I wish it were sometimes. I appreciate all the support and i hope you continue to enjoy this story